

JUDAISM

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From Tenement to Theater: Jewish Women as Dance Pioneers: Helen Becker (Tamiris), Anna Sokolow, Sophie Maslow

J O A N N A G E W E R T Z H A R R I S

JEWISH WOMEN WERE DYNAMIC PARTICIPANTS IN THE first American modern dance groups, creating a powerful performing presence unique in the history of New York City dance and theater. The early modern dance, especially during the 1930s and 40s, with its classes, companies, and performing groups, provided a home away from home that crossed the boundaries of race and culture and offered a freedom to explore and present expressive, revolutionary-artistic, and social ideas. Helen Becker (Tamiris), Anna Sokolow, and Sophie Maslow—three representative figures—were highly admired as leaders and innovators in modern dance, and their Jewish heritage, although not always expressed in the content of their work, was a driving force in their artistic achievement. Theirs was a social consciousness depicting the struggles of the worker, the oppressed, the immigrant, the dreamer, the alienated and always, the creative artist. Sophie Maslow, reflecting on those times, said simply. “We hoped we could do something to improve the world.”¹

The young modern dance movement offered the opportunity to be part of a unique American art form. For these Jewish dancers in New York, a commitment to dance often meant breaking family traditions and finding like-minded colleagues who could and would embrace shared ideals. Martha Graham initially provided such a context for Anna Sokolow and Sophie Maslow. Tamiris, older and more independent than the others, established her own group. The dance that drew Jewish girls from the tenement to the theater gave them a chance to participate in an organized, dedicated activity, a challenge comparable to any political movement of the early decades of the twentieth century. Their lives during the volatile 1930s enacted one of the slogans of the era: dance is a weapon in the class struggle.

Consider what theater dance in America was in the years just before and after World War I. There was little American ballet and even less serious dance training. America had had visits from a few of the great Romantic ballerinas in the period from the Civil War to the turn of the century. Isadora Duncan,

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the American dancer who challenged the nineteenth century image of the female expressive body and the essential nature of concert dance, had created a series of theatrical sensations giving solo concerts in New York and Boston briefly in 1908, 1915, and 1922. Unaccepted by American audiences, she danced in Europe for most of her life. Anna Pavlova's American tours in the 1920s imprinted a ballet image in many towns and led to the establishment of local ballet schools. Ballet was part of the Metropolitan Opera in New York City, but almost all the choreographers, like the operas themselves, were European imports.

Theater producers booked vaudeville shows and revues, skits and acts using comedians, singers, acrobats, and magicians, all on the same program. There were orators and melodramatic renditions of Shakespeare's works. If there were dance numbers, they were usually "Oriental," Spanish, or Gypsy styles. Almost no one, artists or audiences, had seen the authentic versions of these "exotic" dances which were fabricated for the American theater with elaborate costumes and friezes, travel pictures, imitations of opera-ballets, and cabaret acts

The Denishawn School, the first acknowledged modern dance school, was established in Los Angeles in 1915. It was, for the most part, an elite institution for training wealthy young women in the fine art of deportment. The curriculum offered studies in yoga and all forms of "exotic" dance, as invented by Ruth St. Denis and Ted Shawn. The Denishawn Company participated in pageants and early movie spectacles, such as D. W. Griffith's *Birth of a Nation*. For Martha Graham, Doris Humphrey, and Charles Weidman, Denishawn dancers in the 1920s, leaving Denishawn meant a revolution in style and personal commitment. It also meant breaking the ethnic and cultural limitations of Denishawn where, for the most part, minorities were not welcome.

These dancers—Martha Graham, Doris Humphrey, and Charles Weidman, along with Helen Becker (Tamiris)—founded American modern dance. They created works that defined dance as a serious concert art form at a time when classical ballet was a European form, and stage dancing was primarily vaudeville, tap, and burlesque. Twentieth-century artists, modern dancers among them, had long sought a unique American style. The sources they turned to included the rituals of Native Americans, immigrant folk dances from the mountains, plains, and prairies, cakewalks and clog dancing, minstrel shows, and the musical forms of jazz, when night clubs became home to the restless social dances of the 1920s.

To create the early modern dance, these Denishawn renegades established studios and schools, systems of training, and repertories of works. They attracted disciples and protégés and developed a particular style of moving that fit the American body so thoroughly that it became an inevitable part of American life, from the college curriculum to that special invention of our nation's theater, musical comedy. Graham, Humphrey, Tamiris, and Weidman made an American art, an individualized art of movement-energy and meta-

phor, translating to the stage the psychological and aesthetic innovations of early twentieth-century modernism. And from Germany, Hanya Holm brought the tradition of Mary Wigman to modern dance, adding a theoretical framework and dramatic presence to these experiments.

While in the next generation, Anna Sokolow and Sophie Maslow danced with Martha Graham, Tamiris was an “independent.” All three were children of immigrants who came to New York City in that turn of the century exodus from the poverty and pogroms of Czarist Russia. Their parents were workers in the sweat shops of lower Manhattan, while Sophie Maslow’s father had been a revolutionary printer in Moscow. Tamiris and Sokolow both grew up on the lower East Side of Manhattan, Maslow in Brooklyn. Theirs was an immigrants’ inheritance—the need to “be somebody,” make a statement, define an identity that was both American and personal. They carried the heritage of the Bund into their art—the Eastern European workers’ movement “where women were a substantial part of the labor force. They were attracted to this ideology because it offered them equality as women and included them in every level of its structure.”²

A primary institution that furthered the development of these artists was the Neighborhood Playhouse. The Playhouse of the Henry Street Settlement had been established by Irene and Alice Lewisohn. Building on the original mission of the Settlement House, to help immigrants from Central and Eastern Europe improve their lot through language lessons, discussions of union activities, and free medical care, the Lewisohn sisters extended that range of offerings to include training in the performing arts. The great benefactors of the settlement houses held a widespread belief that immigrant children were primitive. The stated objective of instruction was “to train East Side youngsters to sing, dance, speak and mime, in order to transcend their environment by exercising their imagination.”³ Accordingly, the Lewisohns produced festivals of European folk dances and traditional Jewish rites and ceremonials with texts from the Psalms and the Prophets.

Irene (Mrs. Adolph) Lewisohn had been thwarted in a theater career by her Orthodox Jewish father. In the Henry Street Settlement House, she taught the work of Delsarte and Dalcroze, nineteenth-century teachers of music and theater who had developed “natural” gesture patterns and rhythmic exercises as systems to extend artistic interpretation. Like others of her time, she was also inspired by Isadora Duncan. Delsarte, Dalcroze, and Duncan in the curriculum of the Playhouse would, she believed, evoke “true” emotions and give immigrant children a new sense of physical freedom as well as a refined sensibility as young ladies. What Tamiris, Sokolow, and Maslow eventually confronted in this milieu were the traditional attitudes towards women in the theater. Despite the thriving theater world of New York and Warsaw, many “nice Jewish people” generally presumed that any woman who appeared on stage, especially outside the Yiddish Theater, was a person of doubtful morals. “About dancers, there was no doubt.”⁴ Yet, by

working closely with the revolutionary movements of the new social system and the arts world, Tamiris, Sokolow, and Maslow were able to establish themselves as leaders of theater dance.

2. Tamiris (1905–1966)

Helen Becker took Tamiris as her stage name from a legendary Amazon Queen, famed for her beauty and bravery, who led her troops into battle carrying the head of a king. The dancer, Tamiris, is described as full of “childlike wonder” and yet “a force to be reckoned with in the new dance form not even yet named.”⁵ Helen’s father was a sweatshop worker, making policeman’s overcoats as he had made uniforms for the Czar’s officers. She brought lunch to his smelly workroom. She was the leader of her gang, playing Cops and Robbers on the street and Red Rover in the dark hallway of the synagogue. She was red-headed, street-wise, inventive, and restless.

After a performing career which included solo roles in the Bracale Opera in a tour of South America, as a specialty dancer in night clubs and revues, stage shows in movie houses and in the Music Box Revue, she moved into the concert field. Her debut as a solo dancer was on October 9, 1927 in New York’s Little Theatre. She enlisted Martha Graham’s accompanist and mentor, Louis Horst, and performed vignettes to the music of Debussy, Scriabin, and Gershwin. The concert cost her \$800, and when it was over she had a set of costumes and some reviews. Dance historian Christena Schlundt writes, “Immediately she was the entity, Tamiris, the dancer: American modern, a reflection of all that was urban in *Dance of the City* with its siren accompaniment, a suggestion of all that was Hemingway in *Impressions of the Bull Ring* with its flashing colors, a foreshadowing of all that was to be concert jazz dance in 1927 with its Gershwin rhythms, a summary of all that meant ‘Champion of . . .’ in *Prize Fight Studies* with its inimitable opening swagger, a glimpse of all that was Freudian in *Subconscious* with its unabashed nudity, a statement of all that was ‘sex’ in *Twentieth Century Bacchante* with its frank voluptuousness.”⁶

By 1934, Tamiris had performed her solo concerts in Europe, organized the School of American Dance, choreographed her first of many musical comedies, *Fiesta* and “forever encompassed the spirit of the Negro spiritual as her own metier in the three songs: ‘Nobody Knows the Trouble I See,’ ‘Swing Low, Sweet Chariot,’ and ‘Joshua Fit de Battle ob Jericho.’ In all her dances, the ‘Harlem savage’ as she was called, recognized life as conflict and expressed its moods, verbally, physically, and artistically.”⁷ Taking her place among the modernists, Tamiris’ *Manifest*, printed on her second concert program, reads: “Art is international, but the artist is a product of a nationality and his principal duty to himself is to express the spirit of his race. . . . There are no general rules. Each original work of art creates its own code. The aim of dance is not to narrate . . . by means of mimic tricks and other established choreographical forms. Dancing is simply movement with a personal conception of rhythm.”⁸

After an unsuccessful effort to form a Dance Repertory Theatre with Graham, Humphrey, and Weidman, Tamiris developed her own Group. (Agnes de Mille says the other artists just did not like her.) In 1936, the Tamiris Group brought modern dance into the Arts Project of the WPA and later into the Federal Theatre Project under the direction of Hallie Flanagan. That year, Tamiris managed to mount a production of *Salut du Monde*, an extension of her *Walt Whitman Suite* at the Majestic Theatre in Brooklyn. She worked hard to unite a coalition of the dance organizations and finally formed the American Dance Association, "to safeguard the economic interests of dancers, to increase and equalize educational opportunities, and to promote the general welfare of the community through dance."⁹

The next year Tamiris staged *How Long, Brethren?* (1937) for the Federal Theatre Project, which was based on Negro songs of protest, which along with the three spirituals of 1929 were Tamiris' signature works. It had a successful run of 42 performances on a bill with Weidman's *Candide*, and earned Tamiris the first Dance Magazine award for outstanding group choreography. Using the black experience of oppression, she made dances that embodied the spirit of the individual within the group. Graham had used the southwest Spanish-Indian tradition in similar fashion for *Primitive Mysteries* six years earlier. While Graham reached for dramatic archetypes and kinetic simplicity, stressing the individual against the group, Tamiris worked from a more personalized lyrical-movement idiom, which she had developed with other members of her dance group. Tamiris' last production before Congress closed the Federal Theatre Project, *Adelante* (*Forward*), a modern ballet depicting ten scenes of Spanish history as visualized by a Loyalist soldier, was staged from April 20 to May 5, 1939. It is worth recalling that Graham, also inspired by the war in Spain, produced two solos, *Immediate Tragedy* and *Deep Song* in 1937, in response to that terror.

Joining other revolutionary dance groups, including the Red Dancers, the Dance Unit, and the New Dance Group (in which Sophie Maslow and Anna Sokolow performed), Tamiris and her Group danced for the masses: for the American League against War and Fascism, for the American Woman's Association, for the Ladies Garment Workers Union, for Medical Aid to Russia. She gave endless student and studio recitals, joining her fellow dancers in International Festivals. By 1940, when the Federal Theatre project was no more, she was poor—and she was considered "red." But the affirmation that critics had seen in her work prevailed. "The affirmation of life in all its lusty grandeur—that is the heart of the art of Tamiris. To express this to the masses of people was the sense of mission of the woman Tamiris."¹⁰

Finally, between 1943 and 1957, Tamiris choreographed eighteen musical comedies among which were *Up in Central Park*, 1945; *Showboat* (a new production, with Pearl Primus), 1946; *Annie Get Your Gun* (with Ethel Merman), 1946; *Inside USA* (with John Gunther, Moss Hart, Howard Dietz, and Valerie Bettis as the lead dancer); *Carnival in Flanders*, 1953; *Fanny*, 1954 (with Ezio

Pinza); and *Plain and Fancy*, 1955. Her husband, Daniel Nagrin, danced many of the leading parts. Tamiris was exhilarated by this work. Creative collaboration was not compromise. She found it self-enriching and productive. To find the “notes of color” unique to each show and each group, she asked “What is the specific detail that gives character to a movement?”¹¹ She did not impose a technique; she brought out the ability of each dancer, a process that continues as a choreographic method in post-modern dance today, in opposition to the procedures of classical ballet. Unfortunately, this process of drawing out each dancer’s potential does not imprint a technical tradition, as Graham did. The memory of Tamiris’ work is more thematic than technical, the physical energy remembered, but not the movement material.

What is Tamiris’ legacy? She advocated racially mixed companies, a dedication to the voices and physical expression of a multi-cultural society, and a lustiness that reached to the masses. “Long before it became fashionable, Miss Tamiris lived integration.”¹² She struggled through decades of isolation, humiliation, poverty, and antagonism, but she found a creative collective ultimately on the Broadway stage, reaching the mass audiences through the marvels of musical comedy. Like the great Jewish social worker Henrietta Szold, who founded Hadassah, Tamiris brought creative artistry to the American conscience.

3. Anna Sokolow (1910–)

Anna Sokolow celebrated her 85th birthday in 1995. The dance world joined in tribute to her accomplishments and service, her pioneer work in Mexico and Israel. At the celebration, Uta Hagen praised Sokolow, noting that “Movement is used by her as a human experience, not formally, not mechanistically.”¹³ Anna is called “the rebellious spirit” of modern dance. William Bales, one of the three major members of the New Dance Group wrote that “she rebelled against mediocrity, rebelled against any dictum that prevented an individual artist from developing a personal vision of the content for his or her art.”¹⁴

Unlike Tamiris, whose fiery social consciousness advocated the connect- edness of all people, Sokolow’s work often concentrated on the darker, individualized human experience. Critics referred to her as “the Kafka,” the “Poe,” and “the Solzhenitsyn” of the dance. Yet she also choreographed humorous and lyrical works. Jerome Robbins noted that Sokolow’s choreo- graphic achievement was “about the human experience. It unfolds with composure, strength, intuitiveness, and compassion. The spine of her work is uncompromising; the great intelligence of her work is infused with dignity, pride, deep humanity—it is about what she sees, through her choreography with tenderness and strength. What a gift she is, and what a *gift* she gives us.”¹⁵

Anna was born in 1910, the Russian immigrant child of Samuel and Sara Sokolowski, who had come to America three years earlier with their son, Isadore. Rose, Anna, and Gertie were born in Hartford, Connecticut. The

family moved to New York in 1912. Due to Sam's illness, Sara Sokolow became the bread winner for the family. Sara worked in the garment trade and was active in the International Ladies Garment Workers Union (ILGWU) and the Socialist Party. She had an extended family of brothers, but managed without their financial help. She kept a kosher home and observed Shabbat and the holidays. An active and attractive woman, Sara Sokolow wanted more than a traditional woman's role. She took the older girls, Rose and Anna, to the Yiddish Theater, to Central Park, and to Coney Island. She was intensely involved with Zionism and socialism. If the promised new society was not forthcoming, for Sara Sokolow it was still worth fighting for.

New York filled Anna's early years with both the city's pleasures and problems. Her after school hours were spent at the Emanuel Sisterhood of Personal Service on 82nd Street, a settlement house established by prosperous Jews to look after the children of working mothers. There, Anna took her first dance classes with Elsa Pohl, who taught interpretive dancing in the style of Isadora Duncan. Later, she went to the Henry Street Settlement House, the original Neighborhood Playhouse. By 1925 she was living in a loft with other young artists, including her sister Rose, and Rose's husband, the artist Arnold Bank.

Like Tamiris, Sokolow studied with Irene Lewisohn, Blanche Talmud, and Bird Larson. John Martin calls Larson "the first technician of American dance,"¹⁶ a teacher who, by studying gymnastics and orthopedics, developed a physiologically sound approach to dance training. Anna was given a full scholarship in 1928 and was invited to join the special classes of the Junior Festival Players when the Playhouse School opened its new course uptown on West 46th Street. Eventually Martha Graham and Louis Horst joined the faculty. Anna also studied with Michio Ito and Benjamin Zemach, an exponent of Hebraic dance. Indeed, Anna's first theater appearance was in Ernest Bloch's *Israel Symphony* in May 1928, staged by Irene Lewisohn. Sophie Maslow remembers that "It was a very grand sumptuous work. In one scene everyone was at the Wailing Wall beating their breasts."¹⁷

Anna's small person is remembered as adorable and fierce. Throughout her life, her choreography closely reflected her commitment to the social, political, and human conflicts of her times. The chronology of her work, compiled for Larry Warren's biography, *Anna Sokolow, the Rebellious Spirit*, amply details that commitment. Beginning with *City Rhythms*, which was performed at the Neighborhood Playhouse as a student work in 1931, urban themes, such as social action, were ongoing currents in her works. The rhythms are first those of New York City, and later, of Moscow, Mexico City, and Tel Aviv.

The titles of Sokolow's early works, like those of Tamiris' social period, indicate their social concern—*Anti-War Trilogy (Anti-War Cycle)*, 1931; *Solo Dance Concert*, 1933; *Folk Motifs*; *Histrionics*; *Homage to Lenin*; *Jazz Waltz*; *Pre-Classical Suite*; *Prelude and Chorale*; *Romantic Dances*; *Theater Union Dance Group*,

1934: *Two Pioneer Marches; Death of a Tradition; Challenge: Forces in Opposition*: (to a poem by Sergei Esenin). Her technique developed from pure and unabashed Graham. The music was by Alex North (Soifer), later known for his film scores. Costume credit is given to Rose Bank, Anna's sister, her costume designer for 20 years. Her work was performed at mass meetings and worker's clubs. Sokolow received critical, albeit high praise, since from a Marxist position, her dances proved that an individual (rather than collective) could produce work of high quality.

Her solos also showed the influence of Louis Horst who, like Martha Graham, was teaching choreography at the Neighborhood Playhouse. Horst taught dancers to attend to new music, musical structure, visual imagery, and modern directions in art. He fought against the "self-expression" aspect of dance and insisted on personal and choreographic discipline. Since Anna Sokolow was a member of the Graham Company from the beginning, staying from 1929 to 1937, it is obvious that she would take her vocabulary from that source of expressive movement, which concentrates on movement, energy, and intensity. The early modern dance, searching for its native roots, used folk material. Graham's source was the American Indian; Tamiris' the Negro; while Sokolow found her thematic material in the city: jazz, social content, politics, poetry. Again, Sokolow draws a more individualized emotive persona in her work while Graham moved toward the abstract and the archetype. A more detailed study could, for example, compare Sokolow's 1934 works with Graham's *Celebration*, *Course*, and *Panorama*, which are also dances of social awareness of the same years.

In the Depression years, dancers like Sokolow, Sophie Maslow, and Tamiris, of Jewish working class origins, were mobilized by the union movement. "The unions were really my first audience," Anna says. "They would present programs where poets or writers would read their work and singers and dancers would perform in their halls."¹⁸ Anna and Alex North went to the Soviet Union in 1934. The trip cooled her passion for Soviet causes. "Their idea of Revolutionary Dance was to wave a red flag at the audience as they balanced in their toe shoes. It didn't interest me at all."¹⁹

Three years later, in 1937, *Excerpts from a War Poem* (on a poem by Marinetti) was presented at the 92nd Street "Y," one of many Anna would stage at that famous cultural center which was the early home of modern dance. Also in that year, at the fourth Bennington Summer School of the Dance, Anna produced *Facade-Exposione Italiana*, with music by Alex North, another exposé of fascism. After the 1938 *Dance of All Nations*—the pageant for the 40th Anniversary of Lenin's death—she created a memorable solo called *The Exile* to a poem of Sol Funaroff, depicting Jewish life before and after Nazism. The music is listed as Palestinian folk music. In 1939, Sokolow followed Tamiris' lead into the Dance Project of the WPA's Federal Theater Project. For the WPA, she created the dances for *Sing for Your Supper*, a variety show that is primarily remembered because it contained the great narrative, *Ballad for Americans*.

Striking out into new ground for herself and modern dance, she accepted an invitation to Mexico in 1939 by Carlos Mérida, former director of Mexico's School of Fine Arts, becoming the pioneer teacher and choreographer in a land which was engaged in artistic and social revolution. Through the help of Rita Morgenthau at the Neighborhood Playhouse, Anna managed to get her company to Mexico. She found herself billed as a Russian ballerina, much to the shock of the impresario. The Mexico City audience, however, seemed to be able to accept her dancing, although the work was neither ballet nor folk dance. Her company, *La Paloma Azul* (*The Blue Dove*), received acclaim as did her production of the *Antigone Symphony* (1940) by Carlos Chavez. *Las Sokolovas*, as the former company members are known, are still proud to continue her tradition.

By 1940, modern dance had solidified around the work of Graham, Humphrey, and Weidman. The social protests of the Depression were over. Anna, stimulated by what she had discovered about religious dance in Mexico, began to choreograph more actively with Jewish thematic material. She used passages from the Bible in 1943 as part of a Montreal Festival, and *Songs of a Semite*, from a book of poems by Emma Lazarus, for a 1943 "Y" performance. In 1945 and 1946, she danced *The Bride* and *Kaddish* to traditional Jewish Music. She was also drawn back to theater work. In 1946, she choreographed *Street Scene*, the famous script by Elmer Rice, to music by Kurt Weil and lyrics by Langston Hughes. Set in a crowded tenement in the Lower East Side, it was her natural idiom. She used the jitterbug and children's games, dance vernacular now fully accepted but then very innovative. Long before *West Side Story* (1957), Sokolow brought a popular dance swing idiom to Broadway. Her contact with theater people led her to work with the Actor's Studio, Elia Kazan's famous training school. With that training, she built the part of Leah in a dance version of Ansky's *The Dybbuk*, her last concert appearance in 1951. Among her work *Rooms* (1955) deserves special attention. The dance grew from improvisation sessions at the Actor's Studio. It depicts the isolation of the urban dweller. Each dancer sits in a chair, reaching into the space, close to one another, yet out of touch. Each dancer then has a solo depicting an episode: "Dream," "Escape," "Going," "Desire," "Panic," "Daydream," "The End," and "Alone." *Rooms* portrays the nightmare city, each figure trapped in the dramatic intensity of New York City life, exploring the theme of the withdrawn sufferer, part of, though never belonging to, a group.

Anna choreographed many theater pieces on Broadway: *Camino Real* (1953), *Madame, Will You Walk* (1953), *Red Roses for Me* (1955), *Candide* (1956), *Metamorphosis* (1957), *Copper and Brass* (1957), *The Death of Cuchulain* (1957). In Holland she staged *The Seven Deadly Sins* (1967) for the Netherlands Dance Theater, in Israel *The Treasure* (1962), a play by I. L. Peretz, and in 1956, the much-loved and ill-fated production of Leonard Bernstein's *Candide*. With other Jewish choreographers, she staged festivals and fund raising events on behalf of the Jewish National Fund and Bonds for Israel. These included the

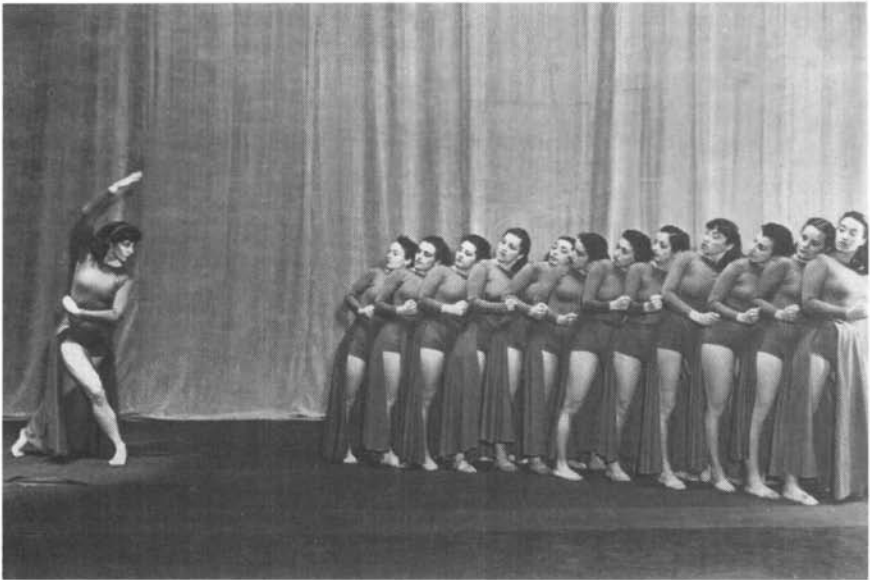
1952 Purim Festival with Sholem Secunda at Madison Square Garden; 1953, Fundraising for Israel Bonds; and the 1954 Chanukah Festival with Kim Stanley and Joseph Schildkraut.

Two other works are worth special notice. *Lyric Suite* (1953) set to Alban Berg's score was premiered in Mexico and then performed at the "Y" in 1954 by Donald McKayle, Jeff Duncan, Ethel Winter, and Mary Antony. The use of Berg's music and the emotive, yet non-narrative choreography made this a landmark in modern dance works. The most important critic and teacher of the time, Louis Horst, said, "Anna, now you are a choreographer."²⁰ *Lyric Suite* could be compared to Graham's *Diversion of Angels* (1948), with music by Norman Dello Joio, a work which also depicts the many facets of love. *Dreams* (1961) evolved in several phases and it was not until 1966 that Anna recognized her concern with the concentration camp imagery that fed the work. It is an allegory of time and helplessness. When it was performed in Holland, the audience responded with the silence of recognition. Just recently, in the concert honoring Anna on her 85th birthday, in the 50th year since the liberation of the camps, the impact of this work was renewed in a new performance.

Anna had first gone to Israel at the invitation of Jerome Robbins who had been asked to start a company there by the American Fund for Israel Institutions. She became enchanted and touched by Inbal, the Yemenite Company led by Sara Levi-Tanai. This amazing group had survived hundreds of difficulties to reach Israel and become a dance company. The American Fund wanted them to perform in Europe and America. Anna brought them her trained professional skill. She said, "Having seen them perform, I realized that their dancing represented a cultural expression I had never seen before and it presented a strange kind of problem to me. On the one hand, I felt that I must not trample on this ground: I must not touch the flower, but try to find out how the flower could be nourished and made to grow larger. They were, and are . . . extremely innocent."²¹ Sara Levi-Tanai, in honoring Anna's work, said, "Your love affair with Israel has been a constant one, which has reflected not only on Inbal, but on so many in the dance community in Israel. It was you who laid the initial foundations that led to the creation of the professional companies that eventually emerged. You have never forgotten your Jewish roots and continually gain spiritual nourishment from all that concerns our people."²²

For Inbal, Anna staged the *Song of Songs* in 1976. With the Juilliard Dance Theater, she built a work called *Ellis Island*; for Batsheva, *Poems of Ecstasy*. In 1979 in Jerusalem she choreographed *The Bible in Dance*, using a setting of the *Song of Songs* by Rachmaninoff, and *Psalms* by Mahler, and in 1982 *Los Marranos* to Ladino folk songs. Yet this versatile woman with her far reaching talents also did the original choreography for *Hair* (she subsequently was dropped from the production), a mime-dance of Beckett's *Act Without Words*; *Magritte, Magritte*, from the painter's works, and *From the Diaries of Franz Kafka*, for dance-theater.

Celebrated at the Conference entitled "Jews and Judaism in Dance" in 1986 at the Joyce Theater as a prime mover in the dance world, Anna's work is still alive today through The Player's Project, directed by Lorry and John May. Anna has dedicated her works to artists and political figures including Isadora Duncan, Anne Frank, Louis Horst, Langston Hughes, Franz Kafka, Golda Meir, Nijinsky, Bishop Pike, Alexander Scriabin, Hanna Senesh—and her parents. Sokolow has given dance and theater a heroism and passion well exemplified by those she honors. Her statement of belief, on the 1995 Gala Program, states that "The artist should belong to his society, yet without feeling that he has to conform to it. . . . He must see life fully and then say what he feels about it. Then, although he belongs to his society, he can change it, presenting it with fresh feelings, fresh ideas. . . . Art should be a reflection of and a comment on contemporary life."²³



Helen Becker (Tamiris) and group - "How Long Brethren?" 1937.

WPA Federal Theater Photograph. Courtesy of the Dance Collection of the New York Public Library

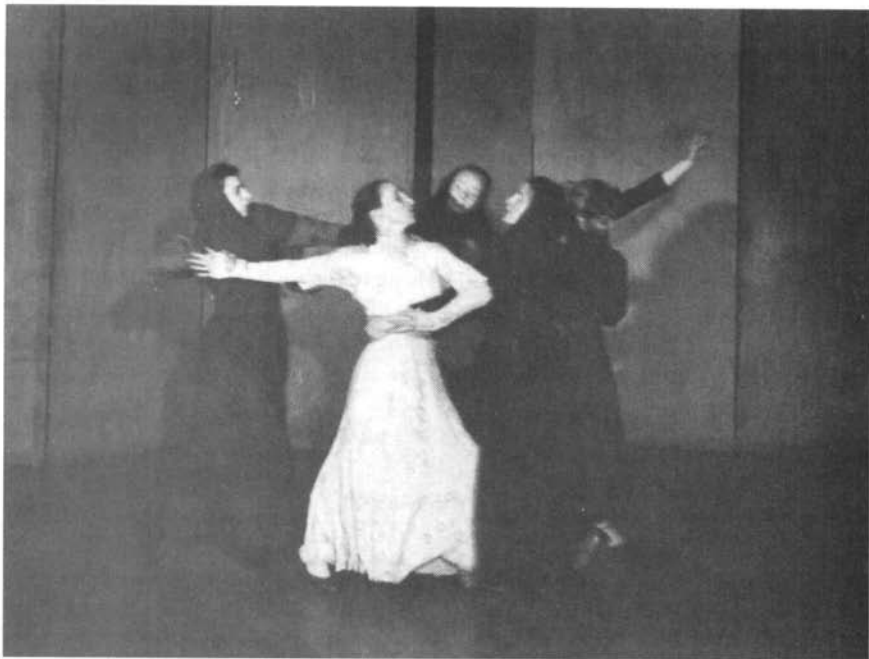


Photo: Martha Krueger (in *The Dybbuk*), Courtesy of the Dance Collection, New York Public Library.

Anna Sokolow and Group.



Photo: Barbara Morgan. Courtesy Ms. Maslow.

Sophie Maslow - Folksay, 1942.



Sophie Maslow and Bill Bales - Folksay, 1942.

Photographer unknown. Courtesy of Leonard Warren.

Photograph by Barbara Morgan. Courtesy of Ms. Maslow.



Anna Sokolow - Kaddish, 1945.

4. Sophie Maslow (circa 1915–)

Sophie Maslow shares her early dance history with that of Anna Sokolow. She too was brought to the Neighborhood Playhouse by her mother, and soon was part of that unique cradle of modern dance that produced the early Graham Company, choreographers who studied with Louis Horst and future educators like Bessie Schoenberg, Ethel Butler, and Martha Hill. She also went to Camp Kinderland in the summers, a Workman's Circle camp. Sophie maintains that Kinderland fostered most of the first modern dance for young Jewish women who went there and taught there. As a member of the Martha Graham Company from 1931–1940, she appeared in such Graham productions as *Primitive Mysteries* (1931), *American Document* (1938), and *Letter to the World* (1940). Sophie is one of the beautiful women pictured in Barbara Morgan's photo essay on the Graham Company, *Martha Graham: Sixteen Dances in Photographs*, 1941.

The beginning of Sophie's dance career coincided with the Great Depression and the Labor Movement. The Workers' Dance League and the New Dance Group were two of many groups reflecting a left-wing spectrum of political views that attracted Maslow. The dancers, often divided by ideology and allegiances, were challenged to reconcile revolutionary and bourgeois dance—dance that proclaimed the workers' movement of the future and dance inherited from traditional forms, even the new, personalized forms as invented by Graham. She was one of those who “could march from the Worker's Bookstore to the Graham Studio in no time at all, a fact that made it possible to fight the spiritual wars of revolutionary politics and modern dance almost simultaneously. Their muscles (and joints) and sinews were trained to express power—artistic and social. Clenched fists, aggressive lunges, and themes of hard physical work were common in revolutionary dance.”²⁴

Nevertheless, Sophie Maslow sees her work as being inspired by a personal heritage rather than by politics or ideology. Her classes offered at the International Ladies Garment Workers Union (ILGWU) were devoid of political content. Although dance could and did communicate left-wing ideology, she understood that dance was a form of expression that could enrich the lives of workers in and of itself.

Dancers and critics in the 1930s were absorbed in a controversy: what was the true source of dance? Most staunch left-wingers believed that folk dance, not individual vision, was the ultimate source. Sophie, with her lyric ability and her strong Graham training, was able to master an idiom that adapted folk dancing to the concert stage. This was folk dancing as only a trained dancer could perform it. Her earliest work, *Themes from a Slavic People*, set to Bartok (1934), was praised in the left-wing press for its lyricism and evocation of folk culture. Also applauded were *Two Songs about Lenin* (1935), inspired by Soviet music and the film *Three Songs about Lenin*. Stacey Prickett remarks that, “Even if Maslow herself was not drawn to political themes, the

evocation of the Soviet Union in her dances touched a responsive chord in the immigrants and new Americans who were heavily represented among the era's radicals."²⁵ Sophie's work received praise from the critic Edna Ocko in *The Daily Worker*. She is described as having "quiet strength and power [that] grows more effective with each successive appearance."²⁶

With Anna Sokolow, Sophie participated in Workers' Dance League Concerts in 1934, choreographing *Death of a Tradition* and *Challenge* to music of Lopatnikoff. In 1936 she choreographed *May Day March*. With Jane Dudley, another member of the Martha Graham Company, she danced *Satiric Suite* in 1937 and *Women of Spain* in 1938. As a good Louis Horst student, she too produced a program of pre-classic dances in 1941. More important was that 1941 saw the first of her signature work—dances to American folk music that depicted the American experience as no one else could do it. To the music of Woody Guthrie, Sophie danced the songs of the migratory workers in *Dust Bowl Ballads*. In 1942, one year later, she developed her first masterpiece, *Folksay*, a folk-medley based on spoken verses from Carl Sandburg's *The People, Yes* interspersed with ballads sung by Woody. Since Woody never sang the same way twice, Sophie performed two of the pieces to recordings by Burl Ives!

Folksay was and is a celebration of the American spirit. It was a work that could heal the wounds of America at war. Even fifty years after its premiere, audiences still hum "On Top of Old Smoky" and "Sweet Betsy from Pike," and identify with its free-swinging, open gestures of greeting, romance, and down-to-earth friendliness. The movement-style of this work consists primarily of big locomotor patterns characteristic of the vast American spaces and look like what every child should be able to do—run, leap, jump, turn, and swing. It consistently enchants every audience. It is informed not by mime but natural gesture, an American body language reflecting humor and affection. Margaret Lloyd, an early dance writer, calls the work "radiantly outflung, joyous and free." The "whole is simple and heart warming and endearing. If popular means of the common people, Sophie wants her dances to be popular. She would like to see dance have as direct an impact upon as wide an audience as the theater and movies do. She believes that the artist is part of and not apart from the common man. Because folk dancing grows out of the common experience of large groups of people the world over, she dances in folk terms. Her dances are instinct with folk feeling, modern in form and lean toward theatrical presentation."²⁷

The war years were full of such Americana, as audiences slowly began to respond to the richness of national lore. Whereas Graham's was high art, Maslow's *Folksay* was a more popular celebration of American culture through song and dance. In 1944, Graham had created her masterpiece, *Appalachian Spring*, with a commissioned score by Aaron Copeland. She depicts archetypal figures from a New England landscape, contemplating interior visions and the harsh religious external world.

After World War II, the folk traditions that were so revered by early Jewish immigrants were no more. In 1950, Sophie realized the loss. She went to her roots, searching the writings of Russian Jewish village life by Sholom Aleichem to choreograph *The Village I Knew*. Long before Jerome Robbins amplified those stories into *Fiddler on the Roof*, Sophie built seven episodes, each depicting Jewish village life, from the celebration of Shabbat to the exodus following a pogrom. Sophie restaged *The Village I Knew* for a variety of companies including the Batsheva in Israel. Initially, young Israelis were reluctant to dance these memories of the old country. As time went on, it became easier for them to accept and enjoy them. *The Village I Knew* was performed in London in 1991 as part of "After the Ark: A Celebration of Jewish culture in Dance, Music, and Song," a festival staged by Jane Dudley upon her retirement from the London Contemporary Dance School.

Jane Dudley, Sophie Maslow, and Bill Bales formed a unique trio that emerged from the Bennington Summer School and the New Dance Group. The New Dance Group survived the political 1930s, survived the period in which "dance was a weapon in the class struggle" and went on to fulfill its promises to bring dance to mass audiences. When other studio classes were unaffordable, the New Dance Group charged 50 cents—and threw in a free lesson in Marxism. The New Dance Group offered many styles of modern dance, ballet, and ethnic, as well as courses in choreography and, later, dance notation. There were children's classes. There was a place for every kind of person and every experiment. Hundreds of people taught, studied, and even slept in the New Dance Group Studios. There was scholarship and scholarships, rehearsals and performances, and always friendship. Sophie was an important part of the New Dance Group, teaching children and adults, choreographing and performing.

Unlike other choreographers the Dudley-Maslow-Bales Trio brought warmth and humor to modern dance. I remember with great joy watching *The Lonely Ones*, based on William Steig's cartoons, choreographed by Dudley in collaboration with Maslow and Bales. The trio also performed *Bach Suite* (1942) and *As Poor Richard Says* (1943). Each of these wonderful people conceived their dances for and about the people. In later years, the Sophie Maslow Dance Company continued to develop dances on Jewish themes. In 1956, she remembered the Warsaw Ghetto in *Anniversary* at the 92nd Street "Y." Like Sokolow, she staged a Bonds for Israel event at Madison Square Garden. For the annual Chanukah Festival at Madison Square Garden, in 1965, she produced her version of *The Dybbuk*. She has also choreographed *From the Book of Ruth* (1964) and *Ladino Suite* (1969).

Sophie continues her active life to this day. She is in her eighties and is still called upon to stage events in synagogues and Jewish Community Centers. She has had a rich life, a loving husband and daughter, travels to many parts of the world, and commands the loyal admiration of students, colleagues, and friends. Sophie remains close to Anna Sokolow. Her most recent performance

triumph elicited a rave review by Anna Kisselgoff in *The New York Times*—of her speech at Anna’s birthday tribute. As usual, Sophie was sharing her splendid spirit with her friends.

Tamiris, Sokolow, and Maslow led the way for American dancers to define their Jewish heritage and celebrate their beliefs. Each had a particular gift: Tamiris, her passion and commitment to both the individual and the collective spirit; Sokolow, her deep exploration of inner life and ability to translate cultural values into performance; and Maslow, her great humanity, generosity, and ability to infuse group vitality. They have given every dancer in America, Jewish or not, a legacy of pride in his or her heritage and a challenge to present the changing vision of that heritage in the world’s theaters, whether or not they, like these three, started in its ghettos and tenements.

NOTES

1. The dance world is a close family. People work together for long periods of time. It is common practice to refer to leaders and teachers by their first names. The Author wishes to thank Sophie Maslow for her time, patience, photographs, and Souvenir Book and for her years of devotion to the modern dance. Lorry and John May at Anna Sokolow’s Players’ Project kindly sent me the 85th Birthday Gala Program, reviews and articles. Larry Warren made the photo of Sokolow available; The San Francisco Performing Arts Library and Museum was also helpful as well as the Dance Collection of the New York Public Library, Lincoln Center. Complete chronology of Tamiris’ work appears in the Schlundt books: of Sokolow’s work, in the Warren book. There is not yet a complete chronology of Maslow’s work: personal communication, interview with Sophie Maslow, May 1995.
2. Charlotte Baum, Paula Hyman, and Sonya Michel, *Jewish Women in America* (New York: New American Library, 1975), p. 87. The modern dance then, was a gathering force for women where their efforts were validated and their work accepted.
3. Leonard Warren, *Anna Sokolow: The Rebellious Spirit* (Princeton, NJ: Dance Horizon, 1991), p. 16. The relationship to settlement houses in the lives of the Polish-Russian immigrants deserves a study in itself. The arts aspect is essential.
3. Warren, p. 10.
4. Warren, p. 10.
5. Christena L. Schlundt, *Tamiris: A Chronicle of Her Dance Career* (New York: New York Public Library, 1972), p. 11. In a recent conversation, Merce Cunningham described Tamiris as “fierce.”
6. Schlundt, p. 10.
7. Schlundt, p. 10–11.
8. *Studies in Dance History*. Volume I, Number 1 (Fall/Winter): 89–90, p. 51. Flyer and program: “Tamiris in a Program of Dance Moods,” Little Theater, January 29, 1928.
9. Schlundt, p. 42.
10. *Studies in Dance History*. Volume I, Number 1 (Fall/Winter): 89–90, p. 105.
11. Schlundt, p. 69
12. *Studies in Dance History*. Volume I, Number 1 (Fall/Winter): 89–90, p. 130.
13. Uta Hagen, *The New York Times*, 2/17/95.
14. Bales, quoted in Warren, *Anna Sokolow: The Rebellious Spirit*, Feb. 16, 1970, frontispiece.
15. Robbins, quoted in Warren, Sept. 21, 1980, p. xiii.
16. Martin, *America Dancing* (New York: Dodge Publishing Co., 1936), p. 167.

17. Warren, p. 21.
18. Warren, p. 33.
19. Sokolow, quoted in Warren, p. 60.
20. Horst, quoted in Warren, p. 147.
21. Sokolow in Warren, p. 136.
22. Levi-Tanai in Warren, p. 134.
23. Sokolow, quoted in *The Modern Dance: Seven Statements of Belief*, edited by Selma Jeanne Cohen (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1966), p. 30.
24. Graff, in *Studies in Dance History*, 1994, p. 3.
25. Prickett, *Studies in Dance History*, 1994, p. 20.
26. Ocko, *The Daily Worker*, Feb. 20, 1935, quoted in *Studies in Dance History*, 1994, p. 80.
27. Margaret Lloyd, *The Borzoi Book of Modern Dance* (New York: Knopf, 1949), p. 184.

Jewish Themes in Stalinist Films

P E T E R K E N E Z

SOVIET STUDIOS BETWEEN 1924 AND 1938 PRODUCED A handful of films on Jewish topics. None of these was a masterpiece and none deserves a significant place in Soviet film history. Nonetheless the fact that Soviet artists made films that depicted poor Jews with a measure of sympathy did say something about the character of that regime. By contrast, the disappearance of Jews from Soviet films was one more sign that the regime by the late 1930s had completely abandoned even the last vestiges of the emancipatory promises of the Revolution.

The second half of the 1920s was the golden age of Soviet cinema. In this period of relative cultural pluralism the individual genius of great directors could flourish, and artists such as Lev Kuleshov, Sergei Eisenstein, Dziga Vertov, Vsevolod Pudovkin, and Aleksandr Dovzhenko, acquired world-wide reputations. However, the golden age was short lived; it ended with the true beginning of the Stalin era in 1928–1929. This was the time of the introduction of the forced industrialization drive, the change in policies toward the peasantry that led to collectivization, the first show trials, and the beginning of the cultural revolution. “Cultural revolution” meant the end to toleration of a degree of pluralism.

In March, 1928, the Party organized a film conference in which leaders expressed their dissatisfaction with the situation in Soviet cinema. It is surprising for us, who think of the late twenties as a period of extraordinary creativity, to learn that the Stalinists were dissatisfied with the situation in the industry. They demanded films that were artistically worthwhile, commercially successful, and at the same time could be used for political education. It turned out that these demands were mutually exclusive: in the best case two out of the three could be satisfied, but never all three.

The Party functionaries recognized that the films were not useful propaganda instruments as long as they could not attract a mass audience. They were correct in seeing that the greatest artists of the age, those who made experimental, innovative films, could not communicate with the simple people who wanted to be entertained. Further, they were worried that experimentation implied a degree of ambiguity in the political message and that was intolerable

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in the new, Stalinist age. Their slogan was “movies for the masses.” This meant that artistic experimentation was to be forsworn. Experimentation was denounced as “formalism,” as something alien to Soviet art, and now each film had to be immediately comprehensible even to the least educated.

The consequence of the cultural revolution was that while cinema became ever more popular, and at the end of the 1930s three times as many movie tickets were sold as ten years before, the choice open for theater-goers vastly decreased. The importation of foreign movies, the most popular ones of the 1920s, stopped, and at the same time many fewer Soviet films were made. While in the late 1920s Soviet studios produced approximately 100–120 films yearly, in the course of the 1930s this number decreased to 30–40. Censorship became ever more intrusive and watchful, and the artists had to satisfy more and more authorities. It became very difficult to have a script accepted, a film completed, and ultimately exhibited in the theaters.

Soviet cinema became homogeneous. “Socialist realism,” the official doctrine of Soviet art, excluded irony, ambiguity, and artistic experimentation. Films and novels created an alternate reality: they depicted not a world as it was, but as it should have been. For such a program to be successful it was essential to keep out the competition: socialist realism could exist only as long as it enjoyed a complete monopoly. The great period of artistic creativity was over, and Soviet film would never again acquire the international prestige that it had enjoyed at the end of the 1920s. With the exception of Eisenstein, who at the time of the Second World War once again produced masterpieces, and Kuleshov, who in 1933 made the remarkable anti-Stalinist allegory, *The Great Consoler*, and then stopped making movies altogether, the best work of the great directors—Pudovkin, Dovzhenko, Vertov—was behind them, and what they continued to produce lacked originality and therefore artistic worth. This is not to say that films of the 1930s were without interest: the audiences watched with pleasure the works of Boris Barnet, the films of Mark Donskoi, made from Maxim Gorkii’s autobiography, and above all, the most popular Soviet film, *Chapaev*, by Grigorii and Sergei Vasilev.

Films on Jewish topics, of course, reflected the general character of Soviet cinema, and their style and concerns changed over time as the propaganda line of the regime changed. Accordingly, it was in the pre-Stalinist period that the best and most interesting Jewish films were made. The first was the very best: *Jewish Luck*. This film was based on the writings of Sholom Aleichem. The hero, Menachem Mendel, a *luftmensch*, was played by the great actor, later a victim of Stalinist terror, Solomon Mikhoels. This was his first appearance on the screen. The story, of course, takes place in tsarist times. Mendel attempts a variety of amusing ways of making a living and fails in each and every one. His last attempt is to become a match-maker. He wants to please the rich man, Klimbak, whose daughter is in love with poor Zalman, by promising an appropriately wealthy rich groom. However, there is a misunderstanding: the promised groom turns out to be a woman, and, in his embarrassment, Klimbak

is compelled to consent to his daughter's wedding to Zalman—and our Mendel is back in search of yet another way of making a living.

Unlike later films on Jewish topics, this one did not ridicule religion and gave a relatively matter-of-fact description of the shtetl. Indeed, critics pointed out that audiences perceived the film as ethnographic. It was also the most Jewish of the Jewish films, inasmuch as the spirit of Sholom Aleichem survived translation from the written word to the screen. *Jewish Luck* was the most successful Jewish film in terms of critical success and audience appeal, both in the Soviet Union and abroad.

The next group of films had a less fortunate history; these were made at times when there was still a degree of artistic freedom, but were ready to be shown only when the political climate had changed. As a consequence, none of them came to be well-known for they received hardly any distribution. The first one of these was *Wondering Stars*, made only a year later than *Jewish Luck*, in 1926, but exhibited only in 1928. It immediately got into trouble and was soon withdrawn from distribution. This film was also based on the writings of Sholom Aleichem, but thoroughly revised by Isaac Babel, who made every attempt to make it politically acceptable. The original story is about two artists trying to reconcile love and profession. In Babel's version, however, the woman is not a violinist but a political activist who has to flee abroad because the tsarist police are after her. In spite of the revisions, the film was attacked for "being over-involved with the Jewish past."

Babel's other effort to make a film out of his stories of the Jewish Odessa bandit, Benya Krik, was not much more successful. The film version, also called *Benya Krik*, is much cruder than the original stories, and without Babel's verbal wizardry the end result is not particularly interesting. Nevertheless, the picture retained some complexity of character and ambivalence. It also failed to please the authorities: the Jewish bandit who in pre-revolutionary times was on the side of the revolutionaries, but at the time of the revolution turned against the Bolsheviks, was not a fit hero in the age of Stalin.

The third of the films of transition, *His Excellency*, was made by the fine director, Grigorii Roshal', but it was not a Jewish film as the other two were. It was part of that very large number of films made in the 1920s about the revolutionary movement, except that here the hero, the revolutionary who attempted to assassinate the governor, was Jewish. The real life person, on whose story the script was made, had been a member of the Jewish socialist movement, the Bund. Naturally this fact disappeared in the film version, for from the foundation of their movement the Bolsheviks had regarded the Bund as an enemy. Even so, the politics of the film were still not entirely satisfactory: by this time the regime did not like to call attention to the fact that people in positions of authority could be assassinated. The terrorists of the Russian populist movement could no longer be held up as heroes.

In this film a rabbi and the representatives of the Jewish bourgeoisie approach the authorities with the request that the Jewish revolutionary should be

severely punished. The point is made that the interests of the religious leaders and of the rich coincide with those of the other exploiters, and, by contrast, the interests of the poor, whether Jewish or not, are the same. According to Soviet ideology, as expressed in this and other films, belonging to a class was a more important part of self-definition than belonging to a nation or religion. In Stalinist films the Jewish community would never be depicted as homogeneous.

From 1929 to the end of the Stalin era only eight films were made in which Jewishness was an important theme. It is, therefore, fairly easy to account for them all. In addition in the early 1930s in a handful of films, characters appeared who were more or less clearly identifiable as Jews. The topics of the "Jewish" films reflected contemporary Soviet concerns.

Soviet nationality policies in the 1920s and 1930s called for the building by each constituent republic of a film studio. Georgia and the Ukraine had had a developed film industry but now even the Central Asian republics acquired their own studios. Films in the studios of the republics, of course, were made in the national language. The Jewish case was different, for the Jews had no territory, and of course could not have their own studio. (Setting up an autonomous Jewish republic in the Far East, Birobidzhan, was a ridiculous idea, and was doomed to failure.) Most of the Jewish films were made in the two republics where the Jews had traditionally lived: the Ukraine, and, even more importantly, Belorussia. In the era of the silent film the language problem was not difficult: in Jewish districts Yiddish intertitles were easily provided. However, with one partial exception, no Yiddish films were made with a soundtrack. That exception was *The Return of Nathan Bekker*, and the Yiddish soundtrack was provided for Jewish audiences abroad, primarily in the United States.

Aside from the fact that the films one way or another dealt with Jews, these were Soviet films of the time. Socialist realist films and novels were all in the genre of the *Bildungsroman*, meaning that they were constructed on the basis of the same scheme: an innocent, but well-meaning hero experiences a trial, overcomes a difficulty, usually under the tutelage of a conscious Communist, and in the process acquires proper class consciousness himself—or herself in rare instances. Class consciousness could usually be reduced to an understanding that there were enemies everywhere, that the Soviet way of life was superior, that it was the duty of decent people to participate in the building of socialism, that the primary allegiance one owes is to Soviet society and not to the family. In the case of Jewish heroes this particular scheme had yet another aspect: the Jew emerges from his own, shtetl environment and joins happy, healthy, and Communist life. Although he would continue to carry in his passport the inscription: nationality, Jewish, in reality he would lose all signs of Jewishness. The films that were made about Gypsies, by the way, carried the same message: the Gypsies would join the happy community of people building a better future.

Soviet films often juxtaposed the dreadful past with the magnificent present. In case of Jewish films, of course, that past meant the shtetl, and, on

occasion, pogroms. Usually the depiction of the shtetl was the most realistic part of the film; the directors, after all, photographed existing small towns or villages.

At the time of the great industrialization drive, Soviet filmmakers were conscious that the capitalist world was suffering from a severe economic crisis. As a consequence, it became increasingly frequent for contrasting scenes to be presented not with the past, but with the misery in the capitalist present, beset with poverty, unemployment, and terror. In several Soviet films we meet people in the West whose greatest desire is to escape to the Soviet Union. If one judged the world entirely on the basis of Soviet films one might have imagined that the task of Soviet border guards was to keep out all those who hoped to enter.

Almost at the same time, two Jewish films appeared that dealt with this opposition. One of them was directed by the great artist, Kuleshov, shot in the major Mezhrabpom studio in Moscow in 1932. The central role was played by the most popular, but definitely not Jewish actor, Nikolai Batalov. In the years of the cultural revolution Kuleshov had been more bitterly attacked than any of the other directors. It was perhaps to atone for his sin of "formalism," for which his previous two films had been denounced, that Kuleshov agreed to make *Gorizont*. Undoubtedly, this was the worst film of the great director.

The complex and confused film depicted the life of a Jewish young man, Gorizont, who escapes from pogromist, tsarist Russia, by deserting from the army. Ultimately he succeeds in arriving in America where his uncle waits for him. It turns out that the uncle has a miserable life in New York and soon commits suicide. Although Kuleshov had always had a keen interest in America, he had never been there, and the place that he depicted did not even remotely resemble the real New York. The film was shown in the United States. It is reported that when viewers saw clotheslines drawn in between skyscrapers they responded with gales of laughter. Kuleshov evidently had doctored pictures of Manhattan that he found in foreign magazines. Nor did the director, who was not Jewish, have any sense of Jewish life. There was nothing Jewish about these characters. Here again, as we would expect, the rabbi is on the side of the exploiters. At the end the miserable and unemployed Gorizont has no choice but to join the U.S. army, and is sent to North Russia with the expeditionary force at the time of the Civil War. He is horrified by the behavior of the anti-Bolshevik forces, supported by the Americans, and once again defects, bringing his comrades with him. He becomes a happy mechanic in the land of the Bolsheviks.

The Return of Nathan Bekker was based on the scenario of the best-known Soviet Yiddish writer, Peretz Markish, and was completed in the Minsk studio in 1932. The film deserves detailed discussion because it is the best-known of the Jewish films. It has most of the characteristics of this genre; it has, so to speak, all the diseases of the proverbial horse. Although the film was made before the principles of socialist realism were officially announced, it is a genuine socialist realist work. The story is exceedingly simple: Nathan Bekker, a Jewish bricklayer, returns to his native shtetl with his wife and black friend after 28 years in depression-plagued, rotten America. Mercifully America is depicted here only

as a collage of extremely quickly moving images and therefore the director did not expose himself to the same ridicule as Kuleshov did. In the course of the film we see how this Jewish worker encounters Soviet reality.

It was a general problem of socialist realist novels and films that either there were no villains or the villains were not credible. Soviet socialism could not be opposed for good motives, consequently most of the films are conflictless and therefore boring. Here the conflict arises from a confrontation of American and Soviet working methods. Soviet workers exercise before their working shifts. Bekker ridicules this idea: these are ballet dancers, not workers, he says. He believes in the superiority of American work methods and challenges the Soviet worker to a competition: who can put down more bricks in an eight hour shift? In the central episode of the film which, appropriately, takes place in a circus, we see Nathan and a Soviet worker compete: who can build a better wall in eight hours. It is doubtful that even the most naive among the viewers doubted who would win in this competition. The audience in the circus seem to be watching this competition eagerly and with excitement, but it is unlikely that movie audiences watched the film with the same degree of enthusiasm. Our hero, when he is defeated, assumes that he would lose his job and would have to go back to America. He is overjoyed to find out that in Soviet Russia society cares about the well-being of the individual. Life is not uncertain and unemployment is not a problem. The film shows the enthusiasm with which the workers are building socialism in the expectation of a brilliant future.

The Jewish community is depicted with some ambivalence, but basically positively. At the outset of the film we see the shtetl: it is a miserable sight with broken-down buildings and children in rags. This is the Jewish environment that is to be transcended. A female communist functionary comes to the shtetl in order to invite people to sign up for work in building Magnitogorsk, a new Soviet industrial center. The Jews, all men, rush to volunteer. We now leave the shtetl behind forever.

Nathan Bekker is played by David Gutman, a Jew, and a Jewish-looking actor, but there is nothing in his behavior that indicates that he is a Jew. His father, however, is played by the great Solomon Mikhoels, and whatever humor, whatever Jewishness is in this film comes through him. He constantly sings Jewish melodies, he gesticulates, he mutters. He plays an old man who is an enthusiastic partisan of the Soviet order, but at the same time altogether naive: When Nathan introduces his black friend to his father, Tsele (Mikhoels) says: is he Jewish? and Nathan answers, no, he is a bricklayer. (The presence of blacks was also a frequent motif in the films of the 1920s and 1930s. In two enormously popular films, *The Little Red Devils* and *Circus*, the point was made that the black man will find his home in socialist Soviet Union for here there is no racism.) When Nathan asks, what is Magnitogorsk, the father could answer only that everyone knows what Magnitogorsk is. At the end of the film we hear victorious Soviet march music, definitely in a major key, as one would expect in a Soviet film. But then, as a coda, we hear Tsele teaching the black

man a Jewish melody. In the new world, after all, there is some room for Jewish traditions, at least to the extent of folk music.

At the time of the cultural revolution a fair number of films were made on Jewish topics. None of these received wide distribution or found places in Soviet film histories. *Five Brides*, made in the Odessa studio in 1929, depicts a pogrom, carried out by the soldiers of Petliura in 1919, and blames the rabbi, who had dissuaded the population from following the retreating Bolsheviks. *The Mutiny of the Old Women*, made in the same year, aims to fight anti-Semitism: Jewish girl marries Russian boy, but the families do not want to accept the union. The happy ending comes as a result of the intervention of the Komsomol. *Remember Their Face*, made in 1930, is also an anti anti-Semitic movie. Here a kulak wants to buy an invention made by a Jew. He is rejected because the inventor wants to use his invention to benefit the Soviet people. The kulak attempts to arouse anti-Semitism against our hero, but he is unmasked, once again, by the Komsomol. *The Man from the Shtetl*, directed by Roshal' and made in Odessa in 1930, depicts a Jew who dreams of making his fortune. But the revolution comes, and he becomes an enthusiast of Soviet power and receives the job of director of a shoe factory.

In the mid-1930s two more films were made on Jewish topics. One of these, *The Frontier*, made in the Leningrad studio in 1935, was a particularly unpleasant anti-Polish film. The story takes place in a shtetl in Poland, only a few kilometers from the Soviet border. The film contains within itself most of the themes of Soviet films of the time: the Jewish capitalist, supported by the rabbi, purposely creates hostility between the Polish workers and poor Jews. The picture we see in capitalist Poland is one of utter misery, unemployment, degradation, and hopelessness. The poor Jews dream of the good life in the East, not far from their shtetl. The Jewish Communist is arrested by the police, but in spite of the wiles of the rich and the rabbi, the Polish workers and poor Jews understand that their cause is the same, and free the Jewish communist.

The last film made in the Stalin era that was devoted to a Jewish topic was *Seekers of Happiness*, made in Belorussia in 1936. It aimed to popularize the Jewish autonomous republic, Birobidzhan. The film depicted a Jewish family which came to Birobidzhan from beyond the Soviet borders. It contrasted the character of the *luftmensch*, who was interested in get-rich-quick schemes and returning to a capitalist country, with honest Jews, who wanted to take advantage of the opportunity offered by the Soviet Union and live a rich and happy life on a collective farm.

Two more films should be mentioned, both made in 1938, *The Oppenheim Family* and *Professor Mamlook*. These films reflected a change in Soviet foreign policy. Up to 1935 Soviet policy-makers did not appreciate the Nazi danger, and consequently Soviet films always depicted a generic West, and drew no distinctions between liberals and fascists. By the middle of the decade, however, the threat from resurgent Germany was obvious, and Soviet filmmakers made six explicitly anti-Nazi films. Two of these, *The Oppenheim*

Family and *Professor Mamlook*, both written by German writers, did show Nazi anti-Jewish atrocities.

By 1938 Jewish themes and, indeed, Jewish characters, disappeared from Soviet cinema. One consequence of the Stalinist terror was a vast reduction of the percentage of Jews in positions of top leadership. The internationalism of the Bolshevik revolution was forgotten and its place taken by an ever-more-powerful Russian nationalism. In this environment the attitude to Jews, the quintessential cosmopolitans, was bound to change. On occasion even mild expressions of anti-Semitism could be heard.

The situation perhaps paradoxically deteriorated during the Second World War. Soviet propagandists were concerned that since their country was a multi-national empire, their enemies might use minority nationalisms to undermine the fighting strength of the Red Army. To counteract that danger, each national republic was allowed to make a film that showed their pride in their history. At the same time numerous films depicted the “friendship of peoples” in which, for example, a Russian soldier saved a Georgian. Often the success of the military enterprise depended on cooperation of peoples of various nationalities.

Against this background, the absence of Jews was conspicuous. Propagandists did not want to give the Nazis the opportunity to depict the Soviet Union as led by Jews and fighting for Jewish interests. Second World War propaganda films which depicted Nazi barbarities never pointed out that a disproportionate number of the victims were Jewish. Indeed, Soviet audiences had no way of knowing that the Nazis had a particular policy toward Jews. Philo-Semitism was not considered to be good propaganda. The Soviet government, however, wanted to take advantage of the financial support of international Jewry and therefore developed a different propaganda line for foreign consumption. Prominent Jewish intellectuals, many of them from the world of cinema, appealed for help, using documentary footage that was not exhibited at home.

During the last year of the war and in the post-war period anti-Semitism became a powerful force that touched the lives and careers of individual filmmakers. The prominent Jewish director, Mikhail Romm, reported in 1962 that during the last phase of the war non-Jews were allowed to return to the capital and participate in the rebuilding of the major film studios, while Jews had to stay in the provincial Central Asia capitals. And in the discussions concerning the second part of *Ivan the Terrible*, the repeated assertions that Eisenstein had not made a “Russian” film was a reference to the Jewishness of the director.

The “anti-cosmopolitan” campaign that poisoned the intellectual life of the post-war period was more or less explicitly anti-Semitic. The victims of the campaign were not all Jewish, nor did all Jews disappear from the cinema world. On the other hand, that a disproportionate number of Jews suffered is without doubt.

Let My Right Hand Wither

SCHNEIR LEVIN

THERE IS MORE TO THIS SAD LINE IN PSALM 137:5 THAN meets the eye. Is there a medical angle to this destructive wish? If we accept as valid the translation “wither,” then a physician’s opinion is surely required. But from this one line a physician can provide no more etiological insight than in similar inadequately detailed accounts of disability such as the nature of the crippling in Mephibosheth, the five-year-old son of King Saul (2Samuel 4:4) or the temporarily paralyzed arm of King Jeroboam (1Kings 13:4). The five English words comprising the title are problematic; the Hebrew original features only two words, *tishkakh yemini*, and herein is no mention of wither and, indeed, no mention of hand. A long favorite translation is “let my right hand forget its cunning.” This is better than “wither” in that the word “forget” is an accurate translation of *tishkakh*. But the words “hand” and “cunning” are placed there by implication, they are not present in the Hebrew original.

What do commentators say? The Art Scroll (New York) rendition translates the two words as “Let my right hand forget its skill” and explanatory comments link right hand with Israel and with God (Psalm 16:8, 60:7). There are other references in Psalms which legitimate *yemini*, my right, with hand (20:7, 21:9, 80:18, 121:5, 139:10). However, several psalms link right not only with hand but also with *zroa*, arm (44:4, 77:16, 89:11, 14, 22, 98:1, 136:12), and this turns out to have some significance.¹

What does a Semitic epigrapher like Mitchell Dahood have to say? In his Anchor Bible commentary,² he provides a medical ending, “Let my right hand wither!” Then he ties this up with a supposed powerless right hand of God (Psalm 77:10, v. 11 in the Hebrew). No medical consideration is coupled with “wither.”

Verse 6 of Psalm 137 also seems to present a medical disorder. “Let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth” appears to be an accurate and acceptable translation of the three Hebrew words *tidbak leshoni lekhiki*. The Art Scroll rendering is “Let my tongue adhere to my palate” and among various explanatory comments ties up this oral disorder with the calamity of the destruction of the temple.

In the Anchor Bible, Dahood (“Let my tongue stick to my palate”) remains an epigrapher and supplies parallel significance of other words but with no consideration at all of a tongue sticking to the palate.

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The usual translations are inadequate in that they don't permit an appreciation that a medical disorder is involved. The problem is that verse 5 has been sundered from verse 6; this shouldn't be; they must be considered a unity, just as the opening of verse 5 ("If I forget you, O Jerusalem . . .") continues in the concluding sentiment of verse 6 (" . . . if I place not Jerusalem above my chief joy").

This single sentiment is an envelope housing an inner medical picture which troubled the Psalmist's mind: let my right *arm* palsy, let my tongue stick to my palate. The Psalmist must have observed children and adults with cerebral palsy, or with the crippling consequence of a stroke, people stumbling awkwardly along with a stiff right leg and a palsied right arm, arm rather than merely hand, and with mumbling speech, with the tongue seemingly sticking to the palate and unable to enunciate words clearly. In nearly all people the speech center, Broca's area, is located on the left side of the middle section on the main brain, the cerebrum, and a cerebral lesion in this area may cause more extensive paralysis or paresis on the contralateral side, affecting the limbs on the right side, and especially the arm, more so than the hand or the leg. The description coupling speech defect with right arm paralysis is thus medically accurate.

With a dearth, in ancient times, of old people prone to stroke, and with greater hazards during childbirth and childhood illness, it is likely that the Psalmist had a picture in his mind of the handicapped figure of the cerebral palsied person, and so verses 5 and 6 could be translated with words like cunning or wither, dangle or lie limp, or more medical terms like lame, crippled or paralyzed or, if one can use palsy as a verb, the way the Hebrew *tishkakh* is used:

If I forget you, O Jerusalem . . . let my right arm palsy, let my tongue stick to my palate . . . if I do not remember you, do not elevate Jerusalem above my chief joy.

NOTES

1. English translations of the references in this paragraph differ from the Hebrew, viz: 60:5, 21:8, 80:17, 44:3, 77:15, 89:10, 13, 21.
2. *Psalms*. Introduction, translation, and notes by Mitchell Dahood. Series title: Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 1970).

The Poetry of Yehuda Amichai

Yehuda Amichai: Down To Earth

J E R E D I T H M E R R I N

THE CONTEMPORARY ISRAELI POET YEHUDA AMICHAH IS enjoying renewed popularity in this country. What his widening readership can find in the poetry as well as Amichai's ventures into fiction¹ is a deliberate jumbling of the public and the private, the past and the present, this country and that country, the exalted and the mundane. In his world, wars become mixed up with love affairs; *Isaiah* mingles ironically with modern technology—"the man under his fig tree telephoned the man under his vine";² the dead of Wurzburg, Germany (where Amichai was born in 1924) are seen again in contemporary Jerusalem; and, in one particularly startling move, the injunction of *Genesis* to "Be fruitful and multiply" gets absurdly associated, by way of sexual "sticky business," with "shaving cream" (Bloch, 121). Here we have a writer of impurity, amalgamation, admixture. In this way, he is the opposite of the writer as alchemist, ceaselessly laboring in an hermetic cell to transmute base metals into gold. Amichai's work rejects preciousness in all senses, committing itself to motley, unrefined reality. The poetry is strong as iron alloy is strong, and meant for everyday use.

Because of his conversational voice and his visual metaphors, Amichai translates well. His eleven books of poetry have been rendered into no fewer than twenty-nine languages, including Afrikaans, Catalan, Chinese, Drentish (a Dutch dialect), Esperanto, German, Slovak, Urhobo (a Nigerian dialect), and Yiddish.³ My own Hebrew being limited, for the most part, to the *Sabbath and Festival Prayer Book*, I have had to rely on English versions. Comparing English versions of Amichai can be a frustrating task: many have tried their hands, and individual poems may make separate appearances under different titles in books more often than not out of print. On the whole, the most powerful and shapely renditions have been produced by (or in collaboration with) the English poet Ted Hughes, and by the American poets Chana Bloch and Stephen Mitchell in the *Selected Poetry of Yehuda Amichai*, which has just been reissued with new translations by the University of California Press. Quotations that follow are drawn primarily from Bloch and Mitchell—some of their translations along with Amichai's original Hebrew are included in this issue. When poems do not appear

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in *Selected Poetry*, or when lines have seemed to me arguably more forceful in Benjamin and Barbara Harshav's *Yehuda Amichai: A Life of Poetry, 1948–1994*, I have instead quoted from their more compendious collection.

Characterized by abrupt turns of thought and metaphors so far-fetched that they can recall Samuel Johnson's antipathetic description of English metaphysical poetry ("the most heterogeneous ideas are yoked by violence together"),⁴ Amichai's poetry nevertheless stays socially engaged and readily accessible. A story circulates that when Israeli university students were called up in the 1973 Yom Kippur War, each packed up his gear, a rifle, and a volume of Amichai's poems.⁵ And one can understand the ethical and emotional appeal of a writer just old enough to be a teenage soldier's father, who stands with impeccable pre-World War II Zionist credentials, and whose poetry speaks with an uneffete, commonsensical authority, particularly about the dilemmas and losses of war. It is not surprising to learn, then, that Amichai's books have been best sellers in Israel since the nineteen fifties; nor that he has shunned Tel Aviv cafe society, choosing to live instead in less arty, historically layered Jerusalem, where he is often seen carrying bags of fruits and vegetables from the market-place. His stance is perhaps best summed up in one of his favorite expressions of value—used by him to describe the sort of language he prefers as well as to praise his favorite authors (among these, the Prophets; the medieval rabbi-poet Samuel Hanagid, who wrote out of a mixed Jewish and Arab culture during the Moorish reign in Spain; and the urbanely ironic and colloquial W. H. Auden): Yehuda Amichai is "down to earth."⁶ "God's hand is in the world/like my mother's hand in the guts of the slaughtered chicken/on Sabbath eve,"⁷ he tells us; and "doubts and loves/dig up the world/like a mole, a plow."⁸

In a 1992 *Paris Review* interview, Amichai tells a story about how, during his World War II service in a Palestinian unit of the British army (his family having immigrated to Palestine in 1936), he first came into contact with modern English poetry—an incident quite literally "down to earth":

Between 1944 and 1946 we did a lot of underground work—smuggling arms and Jewish immigrants into what was then Palestine. We began preparing, on a small scale, for a Jewish state—we were actually preparing for a new conflict while the one we were in was fading away. One event in Egypt had an extremely important impact on my life. It was in 1944, I think, we were somewhere out in the Egyptian desert. The British had these mobile libraries for their soldiers, but, of course, most of the British soldiers, being from the lower classes and pretty much uneducated, didn't make much use of the libraries. It was mostly us Palestinians who used them—there we were, Jews reading English books while the English didn't. There had been some kind of storm, and one of the mobile libraries had overturned into the sand, ruining or half-ruining most of the books. We came upon it, and I started digging through the books, and came upon a book, a Faber anthology of modern British poetry—the first time I read Eliot and Auden, for example, who became very important to me. I discovered them in the Egyptian desert, in a half-ruined book. The book had an enormous impact on me—I think that was when I began to think seriously about writing poetry.⁹

With this episode the older Amichai, retrospectively proud of his military exploits and upper-class education, presents for the literary/historical record a self-epitomizing image: a young Zionist soldier-reader, groping in foreign sand for the secular, poetic word. And the text unearthed is not in Egyptian hieroglyphics or ancient Hebrew, but self-consciously modernist, twentieth-century English. Ironically (and Amichai is a great relisher of ironies), this digging excavates a future instead of a past: Amichai will produce his own brand of modern poetry—a mixture that stirs together Biblical Hebrew and phrases from the diasporan *siddur* with a newly evolving, spoken Hebrew suddenly called upon to accommodate the new nouns and new realities of cars and ketchup, Pepsi-Cola and tanks:

Caught in a homeland-trap:
To talk now in this tired tongue,
Torn out of its sleep in the Bible: blinded,
It totters from mouth to mouth. In a tongue that described
Miracles and God, now to say: automobile, bomb, God.¹⁰

Amichai's self-described "mixed sensibility,"¹¹ then, merges with and emerges from the historical occasion that was the birth of the modern Jewish state and the reawakening of the Hebrew tongue. It is Amichai's genius as a writer to have seized this moment in Jewish history as a literary opportunity and to have seen in his own personal history a microcosm of Israeli national experience:

When I was young, the whole country was young. And my father
was everyone's father. When I was happy, the country
was happy too, and when I jumped on her, she jumped
under me. The grass that covered her in spring
softened me too, and the dry earth of summer hurt me
like my own cracked footsoles.
When I first fell in love, they proclaimed
her independence, and when my hair
fluttered in the breeze, so did her flags.
When I fought in the war, she fought, when I got up
she got up too, and when I sank
she began to sink with me.¹²

In its egocentricity, exuberant and unabashed, its revolutionary energy, and its evocation of youthful accord with a responsive, feminized Nature, these opening lines of "When I Was Young, the Whole Country Was Young"¹³ recall, of course, Wordsworth's Romantic posture—and particularly Book XI of *The Prelude*, in which Wordsworth, recounting the optimism and excitement surrounding his first exposure to the French Revolution, famously exclaims, "Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive,/But to be young was very Heaven!"¹⁴ Yet the overall arc of Amichai's lyric is not Wordsworthian but self-consciously anti-Romantic, swerving as it does from the heroic to the humdrum, from the

blithe to the blighted, with an unmistakable ironic undertow and with characteristic insistence on prosaic, pathos-deflating ordinariness. Here is the poem's final stanza:

Afterward I bought myself some non-kosher salami
and two bagels, and I walked home.
I managed to hear the evening news
and ate and lay down on the bed
and the memory of my first love came back to me
like the sensation of falling
just before sleep.

Anti-heroism, reduced expectations, undercutting of what at first had seemed universal and absolute, with a sense of fragmentation and individual isolation: this poem, so self-consciously about "sinking" and "falling," is very much in line with Western iconoclastic writing of the nineteen fifties. "When I was young" is at the same time a markedly idiosyncratic and local incarnation of modernist tropes and dilemmas, a specifically Jewish work that takes stock of four decades of life in the "Promised Land."

The poem is enriched if one has read Amichai's earlier writing, where the analogy is repeatedly drawn between his beloved orthodox father (dead of a heart attack at sixty-three, at the very commencement of Amichai's writing career) and God the Father; or if one is aware that, like so many of his generation of pioneer Zionists, the young Amichai repudiated orthodoxy; or if one happens to know that when the family immigrated from Germany, Amichai's father and uncle opened a small factory in which they made salami sausages.¹⁵ What is ironically evoked in the last stanza, then, as the speaker goes home with his solitary meal of "non-kosher salami," is not only a dissolution of the original, Edenic reciprocity of speaker and country, but also a personal-cum-national turn away from kashrut and religious orthodoxy, as that orthodoxy was embodied by the previous, largely European generation ("my father was everyone's father").

Religious rebellion is never, however, a settled issue. And it reenacts itself throughout Amichai's poetry, which obsessively conjures up the figure of the simultaneously revered and rebelled-against father, and which repeatedly alludes to sacred texts in order to expose—sometimes with nostalgia, more often with some blend of worldly cynicism and good-natured humor—the gap between what we might think of as the Old Word and the New World. As just one example of this allusive practice, here from another poem¹⁶ is this soldier-poet's sardonic commentary on a phrase from the traditional Memorial Service:

God-full-of-Mercy, the prayer for the dead.
If God was not full of mercy,
Mercy would have been in the world,
Not just in him.¹⁷

Irreverent as they are, Amichai's frequent textual commentary and reinterpretation are in the tradition of Rashi and other Talmudic commentators. His ambivalent and argumentative stance puts him, as Amichai himself acknowledges, squarely in the tradition, too, of Abraham and Job: "I think my sense of history and God, even if I am against history and God, is very Jewish. I think this is why my poems are sometimes taught in religious schools. It's an ancient Jewish idea to fight with God, to scream out against God."¹⁸

The unresolved family quarrel throughout "When I was young" is not only with God the Father, but also with the modern Jewish nation that for Amichai's generation seemed to promise a utopian community, but that ended up—as of course it had to end up—as one more morally culpable nation among other culpable nations. When this advocate of the land-for-peace settlement¹⁹ (and former Haganah commando) writes, "I managed to hear the evening news," he is evoking the commonplace close of an ordinary day; but he is also inviting his reader to imagine hearing what he no doubt heard: the next in what seems to be an interminable series of news reports about Arab-Israeli mutual mistrust and violence. Since the early, heady days of socialist idealism, Israel and her writers perforce have dealt with guilt and with all the grubby pragmatics of nationhood; reluctantly, they have had to come down to earth. It is a resigned, world-weary, but residually romantic speaker who goes to sleep at the end of the poem with only "the memory" of his first love.

Amichai has written a remarkable number of poems having to do with the erotic life: it is almost (as others have remarked) as though, having given up on religion, the poet made an absolute value out of love.²⁰ Almost, but not quite—because nothing in Amichai's gallimaufry of a world is allowed to stand as absolute or unadulterated. The love poems are elegiac as well as earthy; the speaker looks back, sad-eyed yet ruefully smiling, on sexual experiences now inextricably intertwined for him with limitation and loss. Here, for example, from his 1963–1968 volume *Now in the Din Before the Silence*, is the brief love poem "Pity, We Were a Good Invention":

They amputated
Your thighs from my waist.
For me they are always
Surgeons. All of them.

They dismantled us
One from another. For me they are engineers.
Pity. We were a good and loving
Invention: an airplane made of man and woman,
Wings and all:
We soared a bit from the earth,
We flew a bit.²¹

Some cruel and unspecified "They" have sundered the harmless lovers, but there is in any case something endearingly impossible about the lovers'

hopeful “Invention,” just as there is something endearingly impossible about every lover’s dream of overleaping all obstacles. Even before the baneful interference, these two managed to get off the ground only “a bit”—the counterforce of reality always tugging their quixotic flying machine back down to earth, toward disillusion and dissolution. The scientific or technological language—“amputated,” “surgeons,” “dismantled,” “engineers,” “Invention,” “airplane”—is fresh and unsettling in the context of sexual love; the poet seems something of a surgeon himself as he cuts up syntax into neat, brief units. This extreme terseness is a little frightening, suggesting both the zombie-like numbness of the victim and possibly even identification to some extent with the oppressor. The result here as elsewhere in Amichai is a complex tone, mixing helplessness and assertiveness, feyness and *frisson*, affection and anger, woefulness and whimsy.

From the beginning of his writing career Amichai’s love poetry has inclined toward the pessimistic and worldly. In this, if not in sexual preference, Amichai follows his most important English model, W. H. Auden, who also composed modernist love poems in a wartime setting—among them the beautiful and frequently anthologized “Lullabye” (1937), which begins: “Lay your sleeping head, my love,/Human on my faithless arm.”²² Amichai has composed a number of Audenesque lullabies. His “Lullaby 1957”²³ borrows Auden’s ballad-like stanza and incorporates colloquial language and everyday urban imagery reminiscent of Auden. Here is its concluding quatrain:

Let us fall asleep. In the dark corridor
The electric meter will go on
Keeping score, all night,
Always awake, and we shall not worry.²⁴

In Auden’s case (in “Lullabye” and elsewhere), the use of present tense is a means of holding on to the ephemeral moment and drawing a wishful, charmed circle around the lovers—threatened from within by the expectation of homosexual infidelity and from without by social disorder and hostility. Amichai tries, much less successfully, for a similar effect: his “Keeping score” has a forced cleverness, and the uncharacteristic present and future tenses give him trouble. Amichai in his own voice is almost always a love poet of the past tense, of “we were” rather than “we are.” But it must also be noted that “Lullaby 1957” clearly suffers in translation, as do others of Amichai’s earlier and more formally traditional verses, and that the Hebrew text has a wider effective range of tenses.

A predilection for the distant perspective is bound up with Amichai’s most telling difference from Auden: his use of love poetry as a field for specifically Jewish reenactment, rebellion, and rumination on history. Frequently juxtaposing erotic descriptions and religious texts, Amichai tweaks the law of the father(s) and brings the spiritual realm abruptly and often shockingly down to earth. At the same time, he points to the ephemerality of sexual bonding, its flimsiness as

a substitute for religious belief. Here, for instance, is a passage describing a sensual, skewed Sabbath (black instead of white, despairing rather than renewing) from Amichai's longest poem (some forty-two pages), "The Travels of the Last Benjamin of Tudela." Words in quotation come from *Lecha Dodi*, the familiar, beautiful hymn for welcoming the Sabbath as a metaphorical bride:

This could have been a song of praise to
the sweet, imaginary God of my childhood.
It happened on Friday, and black angels
filled the Valley of the Cross, and their wings
were black houses and abandoned quarries.
Sabbath candles bobbed up and down like ships
at the entrance to a harbor. "Come O bride,"
wear the clothes of your mourning and your splendor
from the night when you thought I wouldn't come to you
and I came. The room was drenched in the fragrance
of syrup from black, intoxicating cherries.
Newspapers, scattered on the floor, rustled below
and the flapping wings of the hemlock above.
Love with parting, like a record
with applause at the end of the music, love
with a scream, love with a mumble of despair
at walking proudly into exile from each other.
Come O bride, hold in your hand something made of clay
at the hour of sunset, because flesh vanishes
and iron doesn't keep . . .²⁵

Amichai's intermingling of the sensual and spiritual recalls strategies of metaphysical poets such as John Donne, but the Anglican metaphysical and the Jewish modernist own very different poetic projects. In his early love poems, Donne spiritualizes sex; his later, religious poems sexualize the sacred, making religious subject matter concrete and apprehensible. Donne's transposition of phrases and images may be lewd or pious, silly or psychologically tortured: always, Donne is showy, and always his work situates itself within an orthodox Christian context. Amichai's admixtures of the sacred and the sexual can be as flamboyant, but they are un-Donneish in their post-existential registration of both religious and romantic inadequacy.

Perhaps because Amichai is underscoring a philosophical point, in his love poetry whom we meet is not so much this or that woman as all women, the abstract Female. Whether or not Amichai's poems echo individual encounters, disconcertingly, the women encountered remain on the whole voiceless and faceless, the speaker's emotions not much different toward each one, and each subsumed under the rubric of Love-That-Had-To-Be-Lost. Here are the concluding lines of a lyric from Amichai's 1989 book, *From Man You Came and to Man You Shall Return*:

I'm still inside the room. Two days from now
I will see it from the outside only,
The closed shutter of your room where we loved one another
And not all mankind.²⁶

And here are lines from a poem in his 1963–1968 collection:

And to be alone is to be in a place
Where we were never together, and to be alone is
To forget you are like this: to want to pay for two
In a bus and travel alone.²⁷

We know in each case that the speaker is feeling woebegone, yet his voice participates in, even precipitates, the distancing that pains him. Because we are allowed to see his experience “from the outside only,” the grief in these poems remains iconic, generalized, at some emotional remove; nor do we know anything in particular about the woman whose presence the speaker mourns. This tonal sameness and this blurring of otherness arise from Amichai’s more or less conceptually constant, if metaphorically various, treatment of love. It makes sense, of course, to internalize God as a concept to be turned over and over in the mind while the concept remains essentially unchanged; it likewise makes sense that a dead father would become internalized and fixed in time, so that scenarios replay or repeat with limited variation. But there is something discomfiting about this recording of one lost love after another in which the speaker never (or hardly ever) appears to come into contact with a separate and unique individual as densely specific as himself. To harp on this last point might become dreary, humorless (the last things one wants to appear in the presence of a master of tragicomedy), but it remains a disappointment in work otherwise marked by uncompromising complexity.

The voice of an Amichai poem—we might be able to spot even an unattributed Amichai—comes to us with a tone at once funny and sad, fanciful and commonsensical, sweet and bitter, fluid and laconic. What makes the diverse elements cohere is a somehow recognizably Jewish and Israeli variety of irony, at once lugubrious and tough-minded. If Amichai quarrels with his diasporan fathers, he does so—ironically—by borrowing their method of coping and their tone of voice. Indeed, he sees himself as adopting the voice and view of his own father: “Irony is integral to my poetry. Irony is, for me, a kind of cleaning material. I inherited a sense of humor and irony from my father, who always used humor and irony as a way of clarifying, clearing, cleaning the world around him. Irony is a way of focusing, unfocusing and focusing again—always trying to see another side. That’s the way I see, that’s the way I think and feel, that’s the way I live—focusing and refocusing and juxtaposing different shifting and changing perspectives.”²⁸

A capacity for entertaining multiple perspectives and an attempt “to see another side” may be, in the end, the only hope for peace, in the Middle East, or anywhere—which is why Amichai’s particular deployment of humor and irony carries a certain amount of political as well as poetic freight. In section five of “Jerusalem, 1967,” a long poem emerging from the experience of the Six-Day War, Amichai (whose father, previous to his Israeli incarnation as a sausage-maker, had been a wholesale distributor of tailoring goods in Germany)²⁹ shows us how possible and yet impossible it is to make a human connection with someone on “another side”:

On Yom Kippur in 1967, the Year of Forgetting, I put on
my dark holiday clothes and walked to the Old City of Jerusalem
For a long time I stood in front of an Arab’s hole-in-the-wall shop,
not far from the Damascus Gate, a shop with
buttons and zippers and spools of thread
in every color and snaps and buckles.
A rare light and many colors, like an open Ark.

I told him in my heart that my father too
had a shop like this, with thread and buttons.
I explained to him in my heart about all the decades
and the causes and the events, why I am now here
and my father’s shop was burned there and he is buried here.

When I finished, it was time for the Closing of the Gates prayer.
He too lowered the shutters and locked the gate
and I returned, with all the worshipers, home.³⁰

This long noncommunication, which conjoins the incompatible elements of irony and prayer, takes place in a surprising and generous image in front of a homely “Ark of the Covenant,” a cluttered Arab tailor’s shop in the Shuk. The phrase “all the worshipers” may be read as wishful thinking, encompassing Arab and Jew alike, humanity in general. Yet the speaker here, in spite of his somewhat self-congratulatory and sentimental assertion that he stood “For a long time,” comes across as someone realistic, someone who regretfully concedes the division between Arab and Jew brought about by “all the decades” of irrevocable “causes and events.” He returns to his home in the still-embattled city together with the worshipers who are Jewish. What the shop/“Ark” has on display, we notice, are small, assorted inventions for closing more easily repaired rents or gaps than that between the shopkeeper and the Yom Kippur worshiper: needles and thread, buttons and zippers and snaps. But the poem reminds us that wishful thinking alone cannot join what history has separated.

The refusal to proffer simplistic solutions: Amichai’s speaker here and in most poems is a man who, despite wide-ranging experience and an astringent

intelligence, finds himself, like most of us most of the time, morally troubled and perplexed. And the most perplexing subject for this poet/speaker is the significance of Jewish history. On the one hand, history is clearly the wellspring of his humane art and the source of his most effective metaphors. On the other hand, history is, as Amichai himself acknowledges, the ultimate cause of the ongoing inhumanity that he abhors. In the following passage, for instance, the poet's wry genealogical metaphors come out of and comment on an extensive history of sufferings and reprisals (the phrase "eye to eye" wearily echoing the Old Testament edict of "an eye for an eye"):

Joy has no parents. No joy ever
learns from the one before, and it dies without heirs.
But sorrow has a long tradition,
handed down from eye to eye, from heart to heart.³¹

"I hate war," Amichai has said, "So I hate history."³²

It is unsurprising, then, that one of Amichai's most accomplished volumes of poetry is entitled simply *Time*; unsurprising, too, that one of his best single poems takes up the time-obsessed book of *Ecclesiastes*, which Amichai has praised as "a great, great poem of human despair."³³ In "A Man Doesn't Have Time," Amichai characteristically argues with and even parodies the passage that begins "For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven."³⁴ The poem's opening lines:

A man doesn't have time
to have time for everything.
He doesn't have seasons enough to have
a season for every purpose. Ecclesiastes
was wrong about that.
A man needs to love and to hate at the same moment,
to laugh and cry with the same eyes,
with the same hands to cast away stones and to gather them,
to make love in war and war in love.

And to hate and forgive and remember and forget,
to set in order and confuse, to eat and digest
what history
takes years and years to do.³⁵

This is as good a description of the mixed world of Amichai's poetry as we are likely to get—set down in a straightforward manner by a man of many words whose writing somehow manages to retain the authority of a man of few words; by a Jew who wrestles with his history and his God; by a poet whose aesthetic and ethical project is both "to set in order and confuse."

NOTES

1. For Amichai's fiction in English see *Not of This Time, Not of This Place*, translated by Shlomo Katz (New York: Harper and Row, 1968), and *The World Is a Room and Other Stories* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1984).
2. "Sort of an Apocalypse," in *Selected Poetry of Yehuda Amichai*, edited and translated by Chana Bloch and Stephen Mitchell (New York: Harper & Row, 1986), p. 10.
3. Rochelle Furstenberg, "Poet Revolutionary," *The Jerusalem Report*, Vol. V, no. 15 (Dec. 1, 1994): 43.
4. Samuel Johnson, quoted in T. S. Eliot, "The Metaphysical Poets," *Selected Prose* (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1953), p. 112.
5. Bloch, p. xi.
6. In "Yehuda Amichai," a Lannan Literary Series videotaped March 15, 1989 at Georgetown University, the poet asserts: "The prophets were really down to earth—that's the greatness about them." In *The Jerusalem Report*, Amichai mentions that Hanagid was "a scholar, soldier, commander-in-chief of eleventh-century Granada, a lover, and altogether very down to earth, who also spoke in a personal voice" (p. 46).
7. Bloch, p. 10.
8. Bloch, p. 34.
9. "Yehuda Amichai: The Art of Poetry XLIV," *Paris Review*, Vol. 34, no. 122 (Spring 1992): 227.
10. "National Thoughts," in *Yehuda Amichai: A Life of Poetry, 1948-1994*, selected and translated by Benjamin and Barbara Harshav (New York: Harper Collins, 1994), p. 94.
11. "Yehuda Amichai: The Art of Poetry," 231.
12. Bloch, p. 166.
13. Poem #32 from *Time*, 1978.
14. William Wordsworth, *The Prelude: 1799, 1805, 1850*, edited by Jonathan Wordsworth, M. H. Abrams, and Stephen Gill (New York: W. W. Norton, 1979), p. 397.
15. "Yehuda Amichai: The Art of Poetry," 221.
16. "God Full of Mercy," *Two Hopes Away*, 1960.
17. Harshav, p. 31.
18. "Yehuda Amichai: The Art of Poetry," 259.
19. In the April 20, 1988 *Jerusalem Post*, Amichai is quoted as saying: "As to the territories, since 1967 I have said we should withdraw from most of them. Had we done so 18 or 16 years ago, things would have been much better now."
20. *The Jerusalem Report*, 42.
21. Harshav, p. 101.
22. W. H. Auden, *Selected Poems*, edited by Edward Mendelson (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), p. 50.
23. *Two Hopes Away*, 1960.
24. Harshav, p. 30.
25. Bloch, pp. 79-80.
26. Harshav, p. 383.
27. Harshav, p. 93.
28. "Yehuda Amichai: The Art of Poetry," 246-47.
29. "Yehuda Amichai: The Art of Poetry," 218.
30. Bloch, p. 49.
31. Bloch, p. 126.
32. "Yehuda Amichai: The Art of Poetry," 239.

33. Lannan video.

34. *Ecclesiastes* 3.1, Revised Standard Version.

35. Bloch, p. 145.

Wrestling with the Angel of History: The Poetry of Yehuda Amichai

C H A N A B L O C H

A FRIEND OF MINE TELLS A STORY ABOUT SOME ISRAELI students who were called up in the 1973 Yom Kippur War. As soon as they were notified, they went back to their rooms at the University, and each packed his gear, a rifle, and a book of Yehuda Amichai's poems. It is a little hard to envision this scene: these days we don't think of soldiers as resorting to poetry under fire, and Amichai's poetry is not standard government issue. It isn't patriotic in the ordinary sense of the word, it doesn't cry death to the enemy, and it offers no simple consolation for killing and dying.

Still, I know what these young soldiers were after, because I have often found myself turning to Amichai's poetry as a kind of restorative. Pungent, ironic, tender, playful and despairing by turns, it draws me by the energy of its language, the exuberant inventiveness and startling leaps that freshen the world, making it seem a place where anything is possible. And by the humor, too—a briny Jewish humor that can set the teeth on edge. And I am attracted by a certain astringent quality of mind, a skeptical intelligence that is impatient with camouflage and pathos and self-deceit, that insists on questioning even what it loves.

Love is at the center of Amichai's world, but he is quick to grant that his mistress's eyes are nothing like the sun, that sex is at once an enticing scent and a sticky business. And Jerusalem, the beloved city, he contemplates with a mixture of love and exasperation. No one has written more intimately about this landscape—the dust and stones and the ghosts of barbed-wire fences; the Old City with its Wailing Wall and mosques and churches, its Solomon and Herod

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and Suleiman the Magnificent, all under a cloud of prophecy; the foreign consulates and the housing projects; the Jews and the Arabs; the zealous black-coated Hasidim and the tourists; the brooding presence of the dead.

Amichai's way of seeing this place—and most things he writes about—from both the inside and outside, balancing tenderness against irony, reflects his experience of two very different worlds. Born in Würzburg, Germany, in 1924, he grew up in an Orthodox Jewish home with its strict religious observance and its protective God, as inescapable as family. His father was a shopkeeper, his grandfather a farmer, and his memories of childhood (the political situation notwithstanding) idyllic. In 1936 he came to Palestine with his parents, and his adult life has been lived in the midst of the convulsive struggle of Israel to become a state, and then to survive and define itself. Amichai made his living as a teacher while studying war—as a soldier with the British army in World War II, with the Palmach in the Israeli War of Independence in 1948, and with the Israeli army in 1956 and 1973. He was formed half by the ethics of his father and half by the cruelties of war.

Throughout his career, he has written about memory and the burdens of memory; about the lingering sweetness and simplicity of his parents' lives set against the perplexities of his own; about war as loss and love as a hedge against loss. The most troubling loss is that of his childhood, left behind in the normal course of life and then destroyed by war. "My childhood of blessed memory," he calls it, borrowing an expression commonly used when speaking of the dead.

Amichai holds on tightly to whatever he has lost. "What I will never see again I must love forever" is his first article of faith. That is why there are so many elegies of love here. And that is why the God in these poems, who at times seems no more than a figure of speech, deeply embedded in the language, makes his presence strongly felt even in his absence. Amichai's quarrel with God is what stamps this poetry as so unmistakably Jewish. That quarrel carries on the venerable tradition of Abraham, Jeremiah, and Job—though the object of his irony is the Bible as well, not least the visionary fervor of the prophets. As he writes in "When I Banged My Head on the Door," a poem that may be taken as his *ars poetica*:

When I banged my head on the door, I screamed,
 "My head, my head," and I screamed, "Door, door,"
 and I didn't scream "Mama" and I didn't scream "God."
 And I didn't prophesy a world at the End of Days
 where there will be no more heads and doors.

What Amichai loves best is the ordinary human being with his pain and his joy, a museum in his heart and shopping baskets at his side. In "Tourists" it's not the Roman arch he wants us to care about, but the man sitting nearby with the fruit and vegetables he has just bought for his family. . . .

Amichai began to write in 1948; his first collection of poetry appeared in 1955. Since then he has published eleven volumes of poetry, many of them best

sellers, as well as novels, short stories, and plays. His poems enjoy an enormous popularity in Israel. They are recited at weddings and funerals, taught in the schools, and set to music. And for a poet so rooted in his own place, his work is remarkably well known outside of Israel, having been translated into some thirty-three languages, including Chinese, Japanese, and Albanian.

These poems, chosen from Amichai's best work over a productive career of nearly half a century, should give some notion of his stylistic range: long poems and short, rhymed and unrhymed, in formal meters and in free verse; poem cycles; prose poems and poems hovering at the borders of prose; poems of an overflowing abundance and poems of a tightly coiled concision. All the translations are our own: Stephen Mitchell translated the poems written before 1969, and I translated the later ones.

The poems lend themselves to translation because they speak clearly and directly, and because Amichai's striking metaphors carry the burden of his meaning. But his language is far more dense and inventive than this may suggest. Reading these poems in Hebrew, one encounters allusions to biblical and liturgical texts on every page. The Israeli reader, even one who has not had Amichai's formal religious education, will have studied the Bible from grade school through college, and is also likely to recognize the kind of liturgical texts that Amichai refers to, such as the Mourner's Kaddish or the Yom Kippur service. Because this is obviously not true of most readers of English, we have often borrowed from or imitated the King James Bible as a way of pointing up allusions that might otherwise have gone unnoticed. On the other hand, modern Hebrew, revived as a spoken language only a hundred years ago, is much closer to the Hebrew of the Old Testament than our own language is to seventeenth-century English, and Amichai's allusions never have a "literary" air. So when we felt that the archaisms of the King James Version intruded awkwardly on the naturalness and ease of Amichai's diction, we found other equivalents. And when an allusion would have required too much explanation, we sometimes chose to disregard it.

To write poetry in Hebrew is to be confronted with the meaning of Jewish experience in all its strangeness and complexity. Amichai's provocative allusions—ranging from the witty and mischievous ("The man under his fig tree telephoned the man under his vine") to the subversive and iconoclastic ("The army jet makes peace in the heavens")—are one way of wrestling with the angel of history. The necessity of confronting the past is imposed by the language itself; it is Amichai's achievement to have found in that wrestling his distinctive identity as a poet:

to speak now in this weary language,
a language that was torn from its sleep in the Bible: dazzled,
it wobbles from mouth to mouth. In a language that once described
miracles and God, to say car, bomb, God.

Ten Poems

YEHUDA AMICHAÏ

English translations by Chana Bloch and Stephen Mitchell

God Has Pity on Kindergarten Children

God has pity on kindergarten children.
He has less pity on school children.
And on grownups he has no pity at all,
he leaves them alone,
and sometimes they must crawl on all fours
in the burning sand
to reach the first-aid station
covered with blood.

But perhaps he will watch over true lovers
and have mercy on them and shelter them
like a tree over the old man
sleeping on a public bench.

Perhaps we too will give them
the last rare coins of compassion
that Mother handed down to us,
so that their happiness will protect us
now and in other days.

translated by Stephen Mitchell

אלוהים מרחם על ילדי סוּו

אלוהים מרחם על ילדי הנגן.
פחות מזה על ילדי בית-הספר.
ועל הנדולים לא ירחם עוד.
ישאירם לבדם.

ולקצמים יצטרכו לזחל על ארבע
בחול הלוחט.

קדי להניע למחנה האסור
זהם שותתי דם.

אולי על האוהבים-בבאמץ
יתן רחמים ורחום והצל
קאילו על הלשן בפסקל
שבשורה הצבורית.

אולי להם גם אגחט נוציא
את מקבעות ההסד האחרות
שהורישו לנו אמא.
קדי שאשרם יגן עלינו
עקשו ובימים האחרים.

YEHUDA AMICHAÏ has written novels, short stories, plays, and eleven books of poetry, which have been translated into 33 languages. * His most recent book of poems is *Gam ha'egrof haya pa'am yad ptucha ve'etsba'ot* (Even a Fist Was Once an Open Palm with Fingers) and was published in 1989. In 1982 he was awarded the Israel Prize and in 1986 was made a foreign honorary member of the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters. The first two poems in this group were read at the Awards Ceremony in Oslo, when Yitzhak Rabin and Shimon Peres received the Nobel Peace Prize together with Yasir Arafat in 1994. Rabin read "God Has Pity on Kindergarten Children" and Amichai read "Wildpeace."

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Wildpeace

Not the peace of a cease-fire,
not even the vision of the wolf and the lamb,
but rather
as in the heart when the excitement is over
and you can talk only about a great weariness.
I know that I know how to kill,
that makes me an adult.
And my son plays with a toy gun that knows
how to open and close its eyes and say Mama.

A peace
without the big noise of beating swords into ploughshares,
without words, without
the thud of the heavy rubber stamp: let it be
light, floating, like lazy white foam.

A little rest for the wounds –
who speaks of healing?
(And the howl of the orphans is passed
from one generation
to the next, as in a relay race:
the baton never falls.)

Let it come
like wildflowers,
suddenly, because the field
must have it: wildpeace.

translated by Chana Bloch

שלום בר

לא זה של שביתת נשק,
אפילו לא של חזון זאב עם גדי,
אלא,

כמו בלב אחר ההתרנשות:

לדבר רק על עיסות גדולה.

אני ידע שאני ידע להמית,

לכן אני מבגר.

ובני משחק ברובה צעצועים שידע

לפתח ולעצם עינים ולהגיד, אמא.

שלום

בלי רעש כתות תרבות לאתים. בלי מלים. בלי

קול חותמות כבודות; שיהיה קל

מעל, כקצף לכן ועצל.

מנוחה לפצעים;

אפילו לא ארוכה.

(והעקת יתומים ומסרת מדור

לדור, כמו במרוץ שליחים: מקל לא נופל.)

שיהיה

כמו פרחי בר,

פתאם בכרח השדה:

שלום בר.

from Jerusalem, 1967

On Yom Kippur in 1967, the Year of Forgetting, I put on
my dark holiday clothes and walked to the Old City of Jerusalem.
For a long time I stood in front of an Arab's hole-in-the wall shop,
not far from the Damascus Gate, a shop with
buttons and zippers and spools of thread
in every color and snaps and buckles.
A rare light and many colors, like an open Ark.

I told him in my heart that my father too
had a shop like this, with thread and buttons.
I explained to him in my heart about all the decades
and the causes and the events, why I am now here
and my father's shop was burned there and he is buried here.

When I finished, it was time for the Closing of the Gates prayer.
He too lowered the shutters and locked the gate
and I returned, with all the worshipers, home.

translated by Stephen Mitchell

בְּיוֹם כְּפוּר בְּשָׁנַת תַּשְׁכַּח לְבַשְׁתִּי
בְּגָדֵי חַג בְּהִימָה וְהִלַּכְתִּי לְעִיר הָעֵתִיקָה בִּירוּשָׁלַיִם.
עָמַדְתִּי וּמִן רַב לִפְנֵי כּוֹף חֲנוּתוֹ שֶׁל עֶרְבִי,
לֹא רְחוֹק מִשְׁעַר שָׁכָם, חֲנוּת
בְּפִתּוּרִים וּרְכָסִים וּסְלִילֵי חוּטִים
בְּכָל צֶבַע וּלְחֻצְנוֹת וְאַבָּזִים.
אוֹר יָקָר וְצִבְעִים רַבִּים, כְּמוֹ אֲרוֹן־קֹדֶשׁ פְּתוּחַ.

אָמַרְתִּי לוֹ בְּלִבִּי שָׁנָם לְאָבִי
הָיְתָה חֲנוּת כְּזֹאת שֶׁל חוּטִים וּכְפִתּוּרִים.
הִסְבַּרְתִּי לוֹ בְּלִבִּי עַל כָּל עֲשָׂרוֹת הַשָּׁנִים
וְהַגּוּרָמִים וְהַמְקָרִים, שְׁאֲנִי עֲכָשׁוּ פֹה
וְחֲנוּת אָבִי שְׂרוּפָה שָׁם וְהוּא קְבוּר פֹּה.

כְּשִׁסֵּימַתִּי הָיְתָה שְׁעַת נְעִילָה.
גַּם הוּא הוֹרִיד אֶת הַתָּרִים וְנָעַל אֶת הַשְּׁעַר
וְאֲנִי חוֹרְתִי עִם כָּל הַמִּתְפַּלְלִים הַבֵּיתָה.

from Jerusalem, 1967

Jerusalem is a port city on the shore of eternity.
The Temple Mount is a huge ship, a magnificent
luxury liner. From the portholes of her Western Wall
cheerful saints look out, travelers. Hasidim on the pier
wave goodbye, shout hooray, hooray, bon voyage! She is
always arriving, always sailing away. And the fences and the piers
and the policemen and the flags and the high masts of churches
and mosques and the smokestacks of synagogues and the boats
of psalms of praise and the mountain-waves. The shofar blows: another one
has just left. Yom Kippur sailors in white uniforms
climb among ladders and ropes of well-tested prayers.

And the commerce and the gates and the golden domes:
Jerusalem is the Venice of God.

translated by Stephen Mitchell

ירושלים עיר נמל על שפת הנצח.
הר־הבית אגיה גדולה, ספינת שעשועים
מפארת. מאשנבי כְּתֻלָה המערבי מסתכלים קדושים
עליונים, נוסעים. חסידים ברצף מנופנים
לשלום, צועקים הידד להתראות. היא
תמיד מגיעה, תמיד מפליגה. והגדרות והרציפים
והשוטרים והדגלים והתרגים הנבהים של כנסיות
ומסגדים והארבות של בתי הכנסת והסירות
של הלל וגלי הרים. קול שופר נשמע: עוד
אחת הפליגה. מלחי יום-כפור במדים לבנים
מטפסים בין סלמות וחבלים של תפלות בדוקות.

והמשא ומתן והשערים וכפות הזהב:
ירושלים היא נוציה של אלהים.

Tourists

So condolence visits is what they're here for,
sitting around at the Holocaust Memorial, putting on a serious face
at the Wailing Wall,
laughing behind heavy curtains in hotel rooms.

They get themselves photographed with the important dead
at Rachel's Tomb and Herzl's Tomb, and up on Ammunition Hill.
They weep at the beautiful prowess of our boys,
lust after our tough girls
and hang up their underwear
to dry quickly
in cool blue bathrooms.

Once I was sitting on the steps near the gate at David's Citadel and I put down my
two heavy baskets beside me. A group of tourists stood there around their guide,
and I became their point of reference. "You see that man over there with the
baskets? A little to the right of his head there's an arch from the Roman period. A
little to the right of his head." "But he's moving, he's moving!" I said to myself:
Redemption will come only when they are told, "Do you see that arch over there
from the Roman period? It doesn't matter, but near it, a little to the left and then
down a bit, there's a man who has just bought fruit and vegetables for his family."

translated by Chana Bloch

בקורי אבלים הם עורכים אצלנו,
יושבים ביד ושם, מרצינים ליד הפתח המערבי
וצוחקים מאחורי וילונות כבדים בחדרי מלון,
מצטלמים עם מתים חשופים בקבר רחל
ובקבר הרצל ובגבעת התחמשת,
בוכים על יפי גבורת נצרינו
וחושקים בקשיחות נצרותינו
ותולים את תחתונייהם
ליבוש מהיר
באמבטיה כחלה וצוננת.

פעם ישבתי על מדרגות ליד שער במצודת דוד, את שני הסלים הכבדים
שמתי ליד. עמדה שם קבוצת תורים קיבכ הפדריך ושמשתי להם נקדת
ציון. "אתם רואים את האיש הזה עם הסלים? קצת ימינה מראשו נמצאת
קשת מן התקופה הרומית. קצת ימינה מראשו". אבל הוא זז, הוא זז!
אמרתי בלבי: הגאולה תבוא רק אם יגידו להם: אתם רואים שם את
הקשת מן התקופה הרומית? לא חשוב: אבל לזה, קצת שמאלה ולמטה
ממנה, יושב אדם שקנה פרות וירקות לביתו.

The Diameter of the Bomb

The diameter of the bomb was thirty centimeters
and the diameter of its effective range about seven meters,
with four dead and eleven wounded.

And around these, in a larger circle
of pain and time, two hospitals are scattered
and one graveyard. But the young woman
who was buried in the city she came from,
at a distance of more than a hundred kilometers,
enlarges the circle considerably,
and the solitary man mourning her death
at the distant shores of a country far across the sea
includes the entire world in the circle.

And I won't even mention the howl of orphans
that reaches up to the throne of God and
beyond, making
a circle with no end and no God.

translated by Chana Bloch

קטר הפצצה היה שלושים סנטימטרים
וקטר תחום פגיעתה כשבעה מטרים
ובו ארבעה הרוגים ואחד עשר פצועים.
ומסביב לאלה, במעגל גדול יותר
של כאב וזמן, פזורים שני כתי חולים
ובית קברות אחד. אבל האשה
הצעירה, שנקברה במקום שממנו
באה, במרחק למעלה ממאה קילומטרים,
מגדילה את המעגל מאוד מאוד,
והאיש הבודד הבוכה על מותה
בכרתי אחת ממדינות הים הרחוקות,
מכליל במעגל את כל העולם.
ולא אדבר כלל על יצקת יתומים
המגיפה עד לכסא האלהים
ומשם והלאה ועושה
את המעגל לאין סוף ואין אלהים.

Poem Without an End

Inside the brand-new museum
 there's an old synagogue.
 Inside the synagogue
 is me.
 Inside me
 my heart.
 Inside my heart
 a museum.
 Inside the museum
 a synagogue,
 inside it
 me,
 inside me
 my heart,
 inside my heart
 a museum

translated by Chana Bloch

שיר אינסופי

בתוך מוזאון חדש
 בית כנסת ישן.
 בתוך בית הכנסת
 אני.
 בתוכי
 לבי.
 בתוך לבי
 מוזאון.
 בתוך המוזאון
 בית כנסת,
 בתוכו
 אני,
 בתוכי
 לבי,
 בתוך לבי
 מוזאון.

When I Banged My Head on the Door

When I banged my head on the door, I screamed,
 "My head, my head," and I screamed, "Door, door,"
 and I didn't scream "Mama" and I didn't scream "God."
 And I didn't prophesy a world at the End of Days
 where there will be no more heads and doors.

When you stroked my head, I whispered,
 "My head, my head," and I whispered, "Your hand, your hand,"
 and I didn't whisper "Mama" or "God."
 And I didn't have miraculous visions
 of hands stroking heads in the heavens
 as they split wide open.

Whatever I scream or say or whisper is only
 to console myself: My head, my head.
 Door, door. Your hand, your hand.

translated by Chana Bloch

בְּשֹׁנֶכֶת רֹאשִׁי בְּדֶלֶת, צָעַקְתִּי
 "רֹאשִׁי, רֹאשִׁי" וְצָעַקְתִּי "דֶּלֶת, דֶּלֶת".
 וְלֹא צָעַקְתִּי, אִמָּא, וְלֹא, אֱלֹהִים.
 וְלֹא אֶמְרֹתִי חֲזוֹן אַחֲרִית יָמַי
 עַל עוֹלָם שֶׁבּוֹ לֹא יִהְיוּ עוֹד רֹאשִׁים וּדְלָחוֹת.

בְּשִׁלְטַפֶּת אֶת רֹאשִׁי לַחֲשֹׁתִי
 "רֹאשִׁי, רֹאשִׁי", וְלַחֲשֹׁתִי "דָּד, דָּד".
 וְלֹא לַחֲשֹׁתִי, אִמָּא, וְלֹא, אֱלֹהִים.
 וְלֹא רֵאִיתִי מַרְאוֹת מְפִלְאִים
 שֶׁל יָדַיִם מְלַטְפוֹת רֹאשִׁים בְּשָׁמַיִם הַנּוֹפְתָּחִים.

כָּל שְׁאֲנִי צוֹעֵק וְאוֹמֵר וְלוֹחֵשׁ הוּא
 לְנַחֵם אֶת עֲצָמַי: רֹאשִׁי, רֹאשִׁי,
 דֶּלֶת, דֶּלֶת, דָּד, דָּד.

A Song of Lies on Sabbath Eve

On a Sabbath eve, at dusk on a summer day
when I was a child,
when the odors of food and prayer drifted up from all the houses
and the wings of the Sabbath angels rustled in the air,
I began to lie to my father:
"I went to another synagogue."

I don't know if he believed me or not
but the lie was very sweet in my mouth.
And in all the houses at night
hymns and lies drifted up together,
O taste and see,
and in all the houses at night
Sabbath angels died like flies in the lamp,
and lovers put mouth to mouth
and inflated one another till they floated in the air
or burst.

Since then, lying has tasted very sweet to me,
and since then I've always gone to another synagogue.
And my father returned the lie when he died:
"I've gone to another life."

סיר שקר בערב שבת

translated by Chana Bloch

בערב שבת, בין הערבים ביום קיץ,
כשעלו ריחות אכל ותפלה מכל הבתים
וקול כנפי מלאכי שבת היה באויר,
התחלתי, בילדותי, לשקר לאבי;
"הלכתי לבית כנסת אחר."

אינני יודע אם האמין או לא,
אבל טעם השקר היה טוב ומתוק בפי.
ובכל הבתים בלילה
עלו זמירות שבת עם שקרים,
להתענג בתענוגים,
ובכל הבתים בלילה
מתו מלאכי שבת כזבובים במנורה,
ואוהבים שמו פה על פה
ונפחו זה את זה עד שרחפו למעלה,
או עד שהתפוצצו.

ומאז השקר טוב ומתוק בפי
ומאז אני הולך תמיד לבית כנסת אחר.
ואבי החזיר לי שקר כשמת:
"הלכתי לחיים אחרים."

The Real Hero

The real hero of The Binding of Isaac was the ram,
who didn't know about the collusion between the others.

He was volunteered to die instead of Isaac.

I want to sing a memorial song about him—
about his curly wool and his human eyes,
about the horns that were so silent on his living head,
and how they made those horns into shofars when he was slaughtered
to sound their battle cries
or to blare out their obscene joy.

I want to remember the last frame
like a photo in an elegant fashion magazine:
the young man tanned and pampered

in his jazzy suit
and beside him the angel, dressed
for a formal reception

in a long silk gown,
both of them looking with empty eyes
at two empty places,

and behind them, like a colored
backdrop, the ram,
caught in the thicket before the slaughter.
The thicket his last friend.

The angel went home,
Isaac went home.
Abraham and God had gone long before.

But the real hero of The Binding of Isaac
is the ram.

translated by Chana Bloch

הגבור האמתי של העקרה היה האיל
שלא ידע על הקנוניה בין האחרים.

הוא כמו התגדב למות במקום יצחק.
אני רוצה לשיר עליו שיר וברון.

על הצמר המחלחל ועל עיניו האנושיות

על הקרניים שהיו שקטות כל כך בראשו התי

ואחר שנשחט עשו מהן שופרות

לקול חרוצת מלחמתם

או לקול חרוצת שמחתם הנפשה.

אני רוצה לזכר את התמונה האחרונה

כמו תצלום יפה בעתון אפנה מעדן:

הצעיר השווף והמפנק בברגיו הקנודרים

ולידו המלאך הלבוש שמלת משי ארבה

לקבלת פנים חגיגית.

ושניהם בעינים ריקות

מביטים אל שגי מקומות ריקים

ומאחוריהם, ברקע צבעוני, האיל

נאחז בסבך בטרם שחיטה.

והסבך ידיו האחרון.

המלאך הלך הביתה

יצחק הלך הביתה

ואברהם ואלהים הלכו מזמן.

אבל הגבור האמתי של העקרה

הוא האיל.

Reading Amichai Reading

CHANA KRONFELD

In memory of Amos Funkenstein

YEHUDA AMICHAÏ IS THE MOST DISTINGUISHED HEBREW poet of our time and an internationally prominent literary figure. His poetry is part of the literature curriculum that new generations of readers are raised on, from Israeli school children to college and graduate students in Israel and the United States. His work is the subject of academic conferences¹ and increasingly—though still insufficiently—of serious scholarship.² In the hands of any other poet this poetry's steady diet of allusions, parodic midrashim, pseudo-commentary, and other forms of intertextuality would result in a dauntingly difficult body of work. Yet Amichai continues to be a phenomenally popular poet, accepted and admired as the crafter of the "easy poem."³

In this essay I try to explore how, and perhaps why, Amichai's poetry maintains an accessible, transparent quality even while engaging in an involved dialogues with numerous precursor texts, from the Hebrew Bible to the classics of European literature; and to outline some of the ways in which Amichai's poetic egalitarianism relates to his life-long struggle—and love affair—with textual traditions. I discuss elsewhere in some detail the philosophical and rhetorical aspects of this surface simplicity in terms of what Amichai himself describes in one of his later poems as "the wisdom of camouflage":⁴

But above all I learned the wisdom of camouflage,
Not to stand out, not to be recognized,
Not to be apart from what's around me,
Even not from my beloved.
Let them think I am a bush or a lamb,
A tree, a shadow of a tree,
A doubt, a shadow of a doubt,
A living hedge, a dead stone,
A house, a corner of a house.

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If I were a prophet I would have dimmed the glow of vision
 And darkened my faith with black paper
 And covered the magic with nets.⁵

אך מעל לכל למחתי חכמת ההסוואה,
 שלא אכלט, שלא יכירו אותי,
 שלא יבחינו ביני ובין מה ששכיב לי
 אפלו ביני ובין אהבתי,
 שיחשבו שאני שיח או כבש,
 שאני עץ. שאני צל של עץ
 שאני ספק, צל של ספק,
 שאני גדר חיה, אכן מתה
 בית, פנות בית.

אלו הייתי נביא הייתי מעמעם את זהר החזיון
 ומאפיל על אמונותי בנגר שחר
 ומכסה את מעשי המרובבה ברשתות.

Veiling the poet's intricate artistry under the camouflage net of artlessness is as necessary as covering the windows with black paper during an air-raid or as dimming the brilliance of prophetic vision during the precarious moments of divine revelation. Yet the evocative density of "*ma'asey merkava*" in the last line above (an untranslatable expression interestingly rendered here by the Harshavs as the common but multivalent "magic") affords a glimpse of the allusive depths, indeed the plenitude, beneath the poet's (literally) self-effacing rhetoric ("A tree, a shadow of a tree,/A doubt, a shadow of a doubt"). Amichai's self-imposed minimalism, his project of "dimming the glow" which tradition associates with poetic/prophetic vision is articulated in terms which are anything but minimalist: they go to the center of the complex and often arcane intertextual web that constitutes the rabbinic genre of *merkaba* literature, a genre whose originary moment and *locus classicus* is Ezekiel's uninhibited depiction of "the lineaments of the divine chariot-throne and its angelic bearers," in Joel Rosenberg's vivid terms.⁶ Idiomatically, the expression "*ma'asey merkava*" invokes the secrets of both divine and artistic wisdom. Yet at the same time it can be taken literally here as an implicit elaboration of the image of war, which—given a role of mock-teacher throughout—deflates and demystifies the traditional discourse of poetic and divine wisdom. The concrete experiences of war are described in the poem's title and first half as hands-

on tutorials in the art, theory, or wisdom of camouflage, for “*chokhmat ha-hasva'a*” could mean all three; and the mock-divine chariots (*merkavot*) of our time may simply be tanks hidden under camouflage nets.

In a poem from the late fifties, *La'em* [To the Mother],⁷ Amichai provides one of the earliest thematizations of the tensions inherent in his intertextual camouflage, a thematization that is itself carefully camouflaged, as we see in this section of the poem.

Like an old windmill,
Always two arms raised to yell at the heavens
And two lowered to make sandwiches.

Her eyes clean and polished
Like Passover eve.

At night she lines up all the letters
And the photographs in a row,

To measure with them
The length of God's finger.

כמו טחנת־רוח ישנה,
תמיד שתי ידים מורמות לצעוק אל הקיץ
ושתיים מורדות להקבץ פרוסות.

עיניה נקיות ומצחצחות
כמו ערב פסח.

בליילה תשים את כל המכתבים
והצלומים זה ליד זה.

כדי למדוד בהם
ארץ אצבע האלהים.

The mother of the title is never directly addressed by the speaker. Though it is clear from later sections of the poem that she is the speaker's mother, she is never referred to as *ima* or *imi* but addressed in the title with the formal and universal *la-em*, “to/for the mother.” It is indeed only in the title that she is identified explicitly as the mother. The text itself introduces her through the mediation of the speaker's highly unconventional expanded simile: “Like

an old windmill,/always two arms raised to yell at the heavens/and two lowered to make sandwiches.” [*kemo tachanat ru’ach yeshana,/ tamid shitey yadayim muramot lits’ok el raki’a/ u-shtayim muradot le-hakhin prusod*]. With her body as reference point, the mother becomes the dialogic site of cross-cultural linguistic and visual puns. The initial simile of the old windmill grafts the Hebrew and Yiddish colloquial hyperbole, “a mother needs four hands”⁸ (both “hand” and “arm” are *yad* in Hebrew), onto the literary cliché of fighting with windmills taken from the western canon. The quixotic human struggle is rewritten as the protest of a feisty and combative feminine windmill who does not give up her right to raise a voice—and a hand—against the heavens, even as she continues to care for her family. The windmill, and the mother along with her, turn from object to subject and become the focus of redoubled agency—two and two—fighting and care giving. Amichai’s simile divides the textual image-schema so that the upward, heaven-bound orientation is identified with protest and the lower, earth-bound one with nurturing. In the process he also radically humanizes the theological emblem of “*yad*” (hand, arm), a lexicalized metaphor in biblical Hebrew for divine power, providence, or inspiration.⁹

The mother, like Amichai’s critically engaged human agent, occupies the privileged crossings of cultural categories, between the sacred and the secular, the Judaic and the western. By placing her between heaven and earth, and between the ironic pathos of Jewish slang and the parodic bathos of Cervantes, Amichai both undercuts and redoubles her empowerment. While God’s power in the Bible is always described as a singular *yad* (hand), Amichai’s version of the proverbial Jewish mother is a mock-heroic yet powerful four-armed heroine. And in Cervantes it is the windmills who in the most direct sense win.¹⁰

This figure of the mother (and elsewhere the wife or lover) becomes the metonymy in Amichai’s poetry for the human and poetic subject, a metonymy that is not accidentally female. Amichai is the only mainstream Hebrew poet to present repeatedly his own poetic lineage, at least in part, as a matrilineage.¹¹ He acknowledges his poetry’s debt both to the German Expressionist poet Else Lasker-Schüler and to the Hebrew poet of modernism Leah Goldberg. What the speaker inherits from his biological mother in the poem is also what Amichai as poet adopts from the tradition of women’s writing: the right, indeed the necessity, to personalize, domesticate, and transpose to the first person singular both history and theology, and to use overtly simple, concrete and familiar modes of discourse to confront the most universal and anonymous formations of authority.

Thus, the mother in the third stanza of the poem lines up all the letters and photographs in a row, “to measure with them/the length of God’s finger.” The larger context of this series of poems suggests that these might be letters and pictures of loved ones who died, perhaps “in one of the wars,” in the words of the last line.¹² In her silent act of protest, the mother uses the photos and letters, these personal traces of visual and textual memory as a homemade

yardstick to measure the length of God's finger. The biblically and rabbinically privileged notion of *etsba elohim* (miraculous divine intervention or providence; see, for example Exodus 8:15) is itself a derivation by synecdoche from *yad elohim* (God's hand) in a Judaic context, or *yad ha-goral* (the hand of fate) in a western cultural context.¹³ In the course of this maternal anatomy of the divine it becomes merely a literalized single finger of divine power, as opposed to the mother's four hands or arms. In the process of her personal assessment of God's achievements in the world, the mother—and Amichai with her—call into question both the Judaic notion of justified fate (*tsiduk ha'din*)¹⁴ which is associated with *etsba elohim*, and the western visual emblematics of a life-giving, healing divine finger, from Michelangelo to E.T. The mother appropriates the clichés of transcendent justification for human suffering, and in the process calls to task both the Jewish God and western humanism: when lined up against the row of family pictures and letters, God's finger may not measure up.

A Jewish mother who measures the length of God's finger is not exactly the paradigmatic example of intertextuality in current critical theory. I would like to suggest that it may be a mistake to ignore such examples and the type of personal intertextual engagement which they model.

In his discussion of *Casablanca* as a cinematic archetype, Umberto Eco articulates with almost poetic sensitivity a model for a postmodernist conception of intertextuality (as well as for his own novelistic practice): "Two clichés make us laugh but a hundred clichés move us because we sense dimly that the clichés are talking among themselves, celebrating a reunion." When in later films the dialogue of cinematic clichés becomes a self-conscious act of quotation, it creates an aesthetic marked by what Eco has aptly termed *intertextual collage*: "what *Casablanca* does unconsciously, later movies will do with extreme intertextual awareness." These, he concludes, "are 'postmodern' movies, where the quotation of the topos is recognized as the only way to cope with the burden of our filmic encyclopedic expertise."¹⁵

Whether Yehuda Amichai's poetry is construed as postmodernist, modernist, or anti-modernist—and I have argued elsewhere, within a model of partial yet plural literary affiliations, for all three¹⁶—it provides one of the most sustained examples of intertextual collage in contemporary poetry. Yet it does this while rejecting—ideologically and rhetorically—the alienated, elitist view of intertextuality as the burden of encyclopedic expertise. Amichai's intertextual practice and his meta-poetic thematization of this practice serves me then to call into question current postmodern conceptions of intertextual relations as totalizing conditions.

What seems to be behind Eco's position is the trivially correct view that anonymous tissues of citations encompass all textuality. The extra step which Eco, and other poststructuralist critics before him have taken, though, is that the general intertextuality of all texts renders meaningless any selective, purposeful and critical engagement with any particular one.¹⁷ It is interesting that Israeli theories of allusion and intertextuality developed by Ziva Ben-Porat

on the model of modern Hebrew poetry and by Daniel Boyarin on the model of midrash avoid—each in its own way—this totalizing trap.¹⁸ That they can do so is made possible to a large extent by what the late Amos Funkenstein described as a text-oriented, interpretive Jewish tradition in which engaging in intertextual activities such as exegesis and commentary constitutes “a primary religious command and value.”¹⁹ In Eco’s account, by contrast, a generalized “we”—the universal consumers of the cinematic text—are presented as agentless by-standers, eavesdropping as the reified, personified clichés are having their reunion, even with respect to a cult movie like *Casablanca*.

In focusing on Amichai’s critical-interpretive subject I argue tendentially and directly—and I believe it’s important to state one’s own assumptions as clearly as possible—for the need to reinscribe agency into our understanding of intertextuality. In the process I also wish to underscore the need for a historicized, culturally specific view of the ways poets and readers activate not only allusions but also parodies, pastiches, quotations, etc., and to describe these not as closed encounters between fragments but as the cultural and ideological practices of human beings. What I am advocating is not a simplistic return to the biographical poetic “I” as was common in traditional influence studies but a new understanding of what it means for a human agent, be it a reader, a poet, or a poetic persona within a text, to activate, interpret, critique, and rewrite the collective clichés and stereotypes of a culture.²⁰

The intertextual reunion Amichai’s poetry celebrates is infinitely more complex than Eco’s model suggests, and not because it isn’t cinematic clichés but sacred texts that typically talk among themselves in the pages of his poetry. In fact, Amichai often applies the same strategies which he uses for critiquing the topos of the Binding of Isaac or the Yom Kippur liturgy to quotations from popular songs or, indeed, to the intertextual practices of old movies. What makes things complex, and yet forces them to appear rhetorically simple is, instead, Amichai’s commitment to reinvest intertextuality with *agency*, rejecting its authority as an “impersonal field of crossing texts.”²¹ He does this in a literary age when, for a variety of reasons, both the dominant Hebrew trends and the western modernist/postmodernist models typically advocate an agentless and ahistorical view of the appropriation of textual traditions. Amichai’s reinscription of intertextuality as the practice of a historicized, *ordinary human subject* focuses around this subject’s doubly critical—yet overtly naive—engagement with “the words that accompany [his] life.” (See the poem “Summer Rest and Words,” below.) His is a personal, critical gesture aimed both inward, toward the Hebraic intertextual traditions of a mosaic of quotations (*shibbutz*) or ornate stock phrases (*melitza*), textual commentary, and midrash, and outward, toward Euro-American views of the poetic text as a fragmented, unharmonized tissue of citations. Both Judaic and Western intertextual practices are experienced as vital layers in the unstable geology or archaeology of the self, the verbal spare parts (Amichai’s

pun is *chelkey chalof*)²² which the poet needs to keep fixing and changing in order to survive.

Amichai's claims for agency over inherited or imported "tissues of citations" often take the form of a deliberate deflation by the speaker—and by critics who take him at his word—of intertextual practice. Rendered as the ordinary verbal baggage of a non-poetic "I," his citations aim to create the rhetorical impression of popular or intimate discourse or of a playful fiddling with words even when—or perhaps precisely when—they involve a rewriting of the most sacred texts of cultural memory. Iconoclastic biblical allusions, critical reversals of liturgy, parodies of midrash and rabbinical commentary are normalized and explained away by the speaker's state of mind, his biography, and/or the history of his personal involvement with the texts they evoke. These radical reinterpretations of the *mekorot*, of "the sources," are inserted alongside sub-canonical, blatantly non-literary or non-Judaic intertexts, which are subjected by the speaker to the same scrutiny as the most canonical allusions. Just as Amichai begins some poems with a biblical quotation on which the rest of the poem offers a pseudo-commentary, so does he often cite the text on bulletin boards and plaques, or quotes snippets of personal conversation as the starting point for an intertextual meditation.

I shouldn't have been surprised, therefore (but I was!), to find in his latest book of poetry (1989), a poem titled *Hadera* which starts out with a self-quotation from a phone conversation we had a few years earlier: "*me-olam lo hayiti ba-chadera' ze kmo/psak din memit mi-tsa'ar ve-kove'a uvda, kmo mavet./rak avarti darka ve-lo shahiti ba*" ("I never was in Hadera, 'is like/ a verdict killing by sorrow and establishing a fact, like death. 'I just passed through and didn't stay").²³ At the time I had of course no way of knowing that this innocuous phone call in which I gave Amichai directions how to get to my in-laws' house in Hadera for a weekend visit ('near the water tower you turn left, to Heroes St.')24 would end up as the subject for exegetical meditation in a poem. I cannot tell you for sure therefore whether these are the exact words Amichai used. But I think it's safe to assume that he probably said something like "*af pa'am*" rather than the literary "*me-olam*," that he didn't pronounce it *ba-chaderá*, but *be-chadéra*, and that in all likelihood he didn't actually use the verb *shahiti* with the high-falutin' inflected prepositional *ba*. But of course these stylizations are needed if this phone call is to get us thinking in terms of the philosophical discourse of life and death, love and war while preserving the lexical facade of subcanonical intertextuality (as contrasted with biblical or literary allusion, for example). In fact, however, a highly canonical intertextual dialogue is concealed by this mundane phone call, a dialogue which many other poems conduct more directly, with the great medieval Hebrew poet Shmuel Ha-Nagid.

In a recent article titled "'As in a Poem by Shmuel Ha-Nagid': Between Shmuel Ha-Nagid and Yehuda Amichai," Tova Rosen describes the discourse-structure unique to Ha-Nagid where the starting point for a meditation is in a self-quotation and in "the articulation in the first person of a personal experi-

ence (biographic or pseudo-biographic).”²⁵ The stylistic elevation of self-quotation in the first two lines is therefore not merely a way to make mundane materials more literary but the first step in a carefully structured meditative discourse, modeled, as Rosen astutely observes, on Ha-Nagid’s self-quoting personal meditations. Thus, for example, when *be-chadéra* becomes *ba-chadérá*, the change may enable a pseudo-etymologic midrash on *chadirá* (penetration), just like *darka* (through it/her; literally, her way or road; the femininity of place terms in Hebrew really helps here) is associated by the self-exegetical speaker with the question of how one’s way or route in life is determined. The biographical background, which Amichai has since expanded on in several interviews with me, clarifies the connection between a literal passing through Hadera, the mention of love and war in the poem, and the metaphorical meditation on the ways of life. In the summer of 1942 Amichai passed through Hadera en route to enlisting in the Jewish Brigade in the British army. He had there a brief encounter with a woman. Had he “stayed in” Hadera and not just “passed through” it—his life would have been different. What we must grasp is that the effect created by this internal translation from colloquial Hebrew is precisely the same—and carries the same ideological message—as that created by Amichai’s poetics as a whole: that everyday, personal conversation, even a phone call asking for directions, is every bit as important a source of intertextual engagement as any canonical cultural text.

The poem *Menuchat kayits u-milim* (“Summer Rest and Words”)²⁶ is a recent example of the anti-elitist impact of Amichai’s reinscription of personal agency into intertextual practice; it is also a carefully wrought thematization of this practice, a meta-poetics of intertextuality that, like the other meta-poetic poems in Amichai’s latest volume carefully veils its own radical artfulness.

The sprinklers calm summer’s wrath.
 The sound of the sprinkler twirling
 And the swish of the water on leaves and grass
 Are enough for me. My wrath
 Spent and calm and my melancholy full and quiet.
 The newspaper drops from my hand and turns back into
 Passing times and paper wings.
 I shut my eyes,
 And return to the words of the rabbi in my childhood
 On the bimah of the synagogue: “And give eternal salvation
 To those who go off to their world.” He changed
 The words of the prayer a little, he did not
 Sing and did not trill and did not sob
 And did not flatter his God like a cantor
 But said his words with quiet confidence, demanded of God
 In a calm voice that accompanied me all my life.

What did he mean by these words,
 Is there salvation only for those who go to their rest?
 And what about our world and what about mine?
 Is rest salvation or is there any other?
 And why did he add eternity to salvation?
 Words accompany me. Words accompany my life
 Like a melody. Words accompany my life
 As at the bottom of a movie screen, subtitles
 Translating their language into mine.

I remember, in my youth the translation sometimes
 Lagged behind the words, or came before them,
 The face on the screen was sad, or even crying,
 And words below were joyful, or things lit up
 And laughed and the words spelled great sadness.
 Words accompany my life.
 But the words I say myself
 Are now like stones I fling
 Into a well in the field, to test
 If it is full or empty,
 And its depth.

הַמְּטָרוֹת מְרַגְּעוֹת אֶת וַעַם הַקִּיץ.
 דִּי לִי בְּקוֹל הַמְּטָרָה הַמְּסֻוֶּכֶּכֶת
 וּבְרַחֲשׁ הַמַּיִם עַל עֲלִים וְעֶשֶׂב
 וְעָמִי רָוָה וְרָגוּז וְעֶצְבוּתִי מְלֵאָה וּשְׁקֵטָה.
 אֲזִי הַעֲתוֹן צוֹנֵחַ מִדֵּי וְהוֹפֵךְ לַהֲיִיּוֹת שׁוֹב
 עֲתִים חוֹלְפוֹת וְנִגֵּר כְּנַפִּים,
 אֲזִי אֲנִי עוֹצֵם אֶת אֵינִי,
 אֲזִי אֲנִי חוֹזֵר אֶל הַמַּלְּאִים שֶׁל רַב יְלֻדוֹתִי
 מֵעַל בֵּימַת בֵּית הַקִּנְסֵת "וְתָן יְשׁוּעָה נָצַח
 לַהֲלֹכִים אֶל עוֹלָמָם". הוּא שָׁנָה קָצָח
 אֶת הַמַּלְּאִים מִן הַתְּפִלָּה, הוּא לֹא
 וְאֵר וְלֹא סֶלֶסֶל בְּגָרוֹנוֹ וְלֹא הִתְחַפֵּחַ
 וְלֹא הִתְחַנֵּף לֹא לֵהִי בְּדֶרֶךְ הַחַיִּים
 אֲלֵא אָמַר אֶת דְּבָרוֹ בְּשֶׁקֶט וּבִטְחָה, דָּרַשׁ מֵאֵלֵהִי
 בְּקוֹל רָגוּז אֲשֶׁר לָוָה אוֹתִי בְּכָל חַיִּי.

אני שואל את עצמי למה התכוון במלים האלה,
האם ישועה רק להולכים אל עולמם?
ומה עם עולמנו ומה עם עולמי?
האם מנוחה היא ישועה ואולי יש אחרת?
ולשם מה הוסיף נצח לישועה?
מלים מלוות אותי. מלים מלוות את חיי
כמו מנגינה. מלים מלוות את חיי
כמו המלים על מסד הקולנוע למטה, בשולים
שמחנךמאות את שפתם לשפתי.

אני זוכר שבנעורי התרגום לפעמים
פגר אחר הנאמר או הקדים אותו.
הפנים על המסך היו עצובים ואפלו בוכים
והמלים למטה אמרו שמחה, או שפני המדברים
ארו ונחקו והמלים אמרו עצבות גדולה.
מלים מלוות את חיי.
אבל המלים שאני עצמי אומר
הן עכשיו, כמו אכנים שאני זורק
לתוך באר בשדה לברק
האם היא מלאה או ריקה,
ומה עמקה.

In a series of deliberate self-referential deflations which mimic the secularization of the sacred in Amichai's earlier allusive poetry, the poem reduces the intertextual heritage with which the speaker struggles to a bunch of words that follow him around throughout his life, or to verbal associations that pass through his mind as he dozes off on a summer day. Radical reversals of liturgical texts are subversively presented as pseudo-tradition, as the sleepy nostalgic return to "the words of my childhood rabbi," a rabbi who liked to change the text of the prayer just a little bit, and who modeled for the speaker both an aesthetic and a theology of change through valorized simplicity: his calm voice and unadorned style as well as his practice of changing "ever so slightly" the words of the prayer, have accompanied the speaker throughout his life.

Towards the end of the poem, the rupture which the poet reveals within the intertextual baggage of the culture, the anachronistic inappropriateness of the sacred intertexts to his personal modern condition, is deliberately trivialized

through a simile, which is itself presented as drawn from personal memory and not from the stock of literary figures: the words which accompany the speaker lag behind their referents just like the handwritten subtitles in old movies in Israel in the 1940s and 50s, which could never keep up with the picture. The intertextual baggage that follows him around is hopelessly out of synch with the expressive needs of his reality, the sad or happy human faces on the screen. Yet the speaker “forgives” or “excuses” this as the malfunctioning of an old subtitles projector, most likely of the kind that had the translation “from their language into mine” on the side, *ba-shulayim*, “in the margins,” as the original Hebrew has it. Only after the speaker has asserted his agency over the mistranslations and misquotations which he has inherited can the words reach beyond soporific nostalgia, background music or mere verbal accompaniment. In the final lines of the poem they become, instead, personal touchstones, projectiles that actively, aggressively test the waters, question the plenitude or depth of tradition, and appropriate for the agent the right to assess for himself whether there is anything in it for him, any water left in the well to quench his thirst. It is, therefore, precisely into the well of traditional sources from which he has been drinking all his life that the speaker now assertively throws stones.

It is almost as if in late poems such as “Summer Rest and Words,” in the space between summer siesta (*menuchat kayits*) and final rest (*menuchat olamim*, or *menuchat ha-kets*), Amichai feels compelled to insert an accounting of his intertextual practices, to claim them as his own—the first six lines are a collage of internal allusions to earlier poems of Amichai—and in the process to take personal responsibility for their success or failure, meaningfulness or emptiness.

Reinscribing human agency into the impersonal tissue of citations doesn’t allow for much authority to remain, either in “the sources” or in their contemporary iconoclastic appropriation. But that, Amichai ventures to suggest, can only be for the better.

NOTES

1. Conferences on Amichai’s work include, most recently, the gathering in July 1994 at the Oxford Center for Postgraduate Hebrew Studies on the occasion of the poet’s 70th birthday. Recent versions of this essay were presented at the Amos Funkenstein Memorial Symposium at Berkeley (March, 1996) and the Interuniversity Conference on intertextuality in Hebrew literature at Tel Aviv University (February, 1996). I am grateful to Rutie Adler, Daniel Boyarin and Amichai Kronfeld for their many helpful comments and to Eliyah Arnon for his resourceful assistance with the research.

2. In Hebrew there are three book length studies of Amichai to date: Boaz Arpali’s *Ha-prachim ve-ha-agartal: shirat Amichai 1948–1968* [*The Flowers and the Urn: Amichai’s Poetry 1948–1968*] (Tel Aviv: Ha-kibbutz ha-me’uchad, 1986); Yehudit Tzvik, ed., *Yehuda Amichai: Mivchar ma’amarey bikoret al yetsirato* [*Yehuda Amichai: A Selection of Critical Essays on His Writings*] (Tel Aviv: Ha-kibbutz ha-me’uchad, 1988); and most recently, Nili Gold, *Lo ka-brosh: gilguley imajim ve-tavniyot be-shirat Yehuda Amichai* [*Not As a Cypress: Transformations of Images and Patterns in Yehuda Amichai’s Poetry*] (Jerusalem: Schocken, 1994). In English there is only one book so far, Glenda Abramson’s *The Writing of Yehuda Amichai: A Thematic Approach* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989).

3. See Shimon Sandbank's article, "li-she'elat ha-shir ha-kal" ["On the Question of the Easy Poem"], in his *Ha-shir ha-nakhon* [*The True Poem*] (Tel Aviv: Sifriat Poalim, 1982), pp. 92–97.
4. See the poem by that name in *Gam ha'egrof haya pa'am yad ptucha ve'etsba'ot* [*Even a Fist Was Once an Open Palm with Fingers*] (Jerusalem: Schocken, 1989), pp. 15–16, quoted by permission. For a discussion of Amichai's poetics of deceptive simplicity, see my article "The Wisdom of Camouflage": Between Rhetoric and Philosophy in Amichai's Poetic System," *Prooftexts* 10 (3): 469–91.
5. From: "Ma lamadeti ba-milchamot" ["What Did I Learn in the Wars"] in *Gam Ha-Egrof* [*Even a Fist*], p. 16. Translation in *Yehuda Amichai: A Life of Poetry 1948–1994*, translated by Benjamin and Barbara Harshav (New York: Harper Collins, 1994), p. 412.
6. In "Jeremiah and Ezekiel," *The Literary Guide to the Bible*, edited by Robert Alter and Frank Kermode (Cambridge: Belknap/Harvard University Press, 1987), p. 195.
7. *Shirim* 1948–1962, pp. 91–92, the translation is my own.
8. Other human nouns can replace "mother" in this semi-productive fixed expression.
9. See, for example, *yad chazaka* (divine might, heroism), Exodus 13:9; and *yad h' + preposition al* (as onset of divine inspiration, of the spirit of God), common in the prophecy books (e.g., *hayta alay yad h'*, Ezekiel 37:1); whereas *yad h' + preposition be-* indicates usually the onset of divine retribution or punishment (e.g., Exodus 9:3, Deuteronomy 2:15). The question as to whether *yad* is a metaphor or a metonymy has to do with the relationship between anthropomorphism and revelation, or—in the terms of the present discussion—between *yad* and *ma'ase merkava*. For critical references see note 13 below. On the relation between metaphor, metonymy, images of the hand and the figure of the mother in other poems by Amichai see Dan Miron, *Mul ha-ach ha-shotek* [*Facing the Silent Brother*] (Jerusalem: Keter, 1992), p. 289.
10. I owe this observation to Daniel Boyarin.
11. See Arpali's recent essay "Al ha-mashma'ut ha-politit shel shirat Yehuda Amichai ["On the Political Meaning of Yehuda Amichai's Poetry"], in *Iyunim bi-tkumat Israel*, 5 (1995): 482 and Nili Gold's lecture on the feminine modeling of the father figure in Amichai, in the 1994 Oxford Conference (see note 1 above).
12. Note, however, how her grief is veiled through the metaphor in the second stanza. While the "official" import of the figure of the passover eve is to underscore the purity and cleanliness of the mother's eyes, the tears that washed the eyes and made them sparkle are very much in the background.
13. The details of this derivation can be described within the partial systematicity of metaphorical systems in the account of George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980). Both the divine *yad* and *etsba* need to be understood within the contested traditions of biblical and post-biblical anthropomorphism. Daniel Boyarin makes a compelling case for the role of Neoplatonic and Aristotelean revisions of Judaism in affecting "a near-total forgetting of the biblical and Rabbinic tradition of God's visibility." See his "The Eye in the Torah: Ocular Desire in the Midrashic Hermeneutic," *Critical Inquiry*, 16: 3 (1990): 533–34, and also James Barr, "Theophany and Anthropomorphism in the Old Testament," *Supplements to Vetus Testamentum*, 7 (1960): 31–38. Barr makes a strong argument for the connection between anthropomorphism and memory (1960: 38). On the hesitation between literal and figurative and between metaphor and metonymy in the biblical imagery for God, see G. B. Caird, *The Language and Imagery of the Bible* (London: Duckworth, 1980), and Peter W. Macky, *The Centrality of Metaphors to Biblical Thought* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 1990).
14. See, for example, Tractate *Avoda Zara*, 18.
15. "Casablanca: Cult Movies and Intertextual Collage," in his *Travels in Hyperreality*, translated by William Weaver (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1986), pp. 208–209.
16. On the possibility, indeed the necessity, to reconstruct a poet's relationship with the literary trends of his time as a set of multiple, partially overlapping or even contradictory affiliations, see my *On the Margins of Modernism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996).
17. See, for example, Julia Kristeva, *Sémiotiké: Recherches pour une sémanalyse* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, [1966] 1969), and Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author," translated by Stephen Heath. *Image-Music-Text* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), pp. 142–48.

18. See, for example, Ziva Ben-Porat, "Beyn-textualiyut retorit" ["Intertextuality, Rhetorical Intertextuality, Allusion, and Parody"], *Ha-Sifrut*, 34 (1985): 170–78; and Daniel Boyarin, *Intertextuality and the Reading of Midrash* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, [1990] 1994), p. 135n.2. Jonathan Culler was one of the first to point out this difficulty in poststructuralist theories of intertextuality in his *The Pursuit of Signs* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981), pp. 104–07. And see my comparison of poststructuralist and Israeli neo-formalist views of intertextuality in "Allusion: An Israeli Perspective," *Prooftexts*, 5:2(1985):137–63.
19. "Intellectuals and Jews," The Bilgray Lecture, University of Arizona, 6 April 1989:4. And see also pp. 13–14.
20. In this I find myself in agreement with many of the goals, though often not the methodology represented in recent attempts to revise intertextual theory, for example in an important recent collection of essays edited by Jay Clayton and Eric Rothstein, *Influence and Intertextuality in Literary History* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991).
21. In Clayton and Rothstein's formulation of the poststructuralist position. In their excellent introduction they present a totally uncritical view of Eco's essay on *Casablanca* (1991: 32n7). I am grateful to Ron Helstad for sharing his ideas on this important volume with me.
22. See "Mas'ot binyamin ha-acharon mi-tudela" [The Travels of the Last Benjamin of Tudela], in *Akhshav ba-ra'ash* [Now in the Storm] (Jerusalem: Schocken, [1968] 1975), p. 122.
23. "Hadera," *Gam Ha-Egrof* [Even a Fist] (1989): 99, quoted by permission. English translation in Harshav and Harshav (1994): 445, quoted by permission of the authors and Harper Collins.
24. These directions are echoed in the second stanza of the poem.
25. "'Kmo be-shir shel Shmuel ha-Nagid': beyn Shmuel ha-Nagid li-Yehuda Amichai," *Mechkarey yerushalayim be-sifrut ivrit*, 15 (1995): 93.
26. *Gam ha-egrof* [Even a fist] (1989): 65–66. English translation in *Yehuda Amichai: A Life of Poetry 1948–1994*, translated by Benjamin and Barbara Harshav (New York: Harper Collins, 1994), pp. 428–429, quoted by permission of the authors and Harper Collins.

Moses Montefiore, a Hebrew Prayer Book, and Medicine in the Holy Land

MANFRED WASERMAN &
AMALIE MOSES KASS

THE COVER OF A HEBREW PRAYER BOOK RECENTLY donated to the Library of the Hebrew Union College - Jewish Institute of Religion in Cincinnati, is inscribed, in gold lettering:

Presented by Sir Moses Montefiore, F.R.S. to Dr. Simon Fraenkel on his proceeding to the Holy Land, 5603 [1843]

On the inside of the cover is Montefiore's personal bookplate. The origins of the prayer book reveal the story of Montefiore's attempt to relieve the suffering of poor and sick Jews in Jerusalem.

The prayer book, measuring 5 1/2 inches by 8 1/2 inches and bound in brown Moroccan leather, is the first of a five volume set of prayers for all the religious services of the Jewish year. Volume I contains the daily prayers. The complete set, *Forms of Prayer According to the Custom of the Spanish and Portuguese Jews, with an English Translation*, was printed in London between 1836 and 1838.¹ The arrangement of the Hebrew text and translation into English was done by the Reverend David de Aaron de Sola, Minister of the Congregation at the Bevis Marks Synagogue in London.² Although it was not the first Hebrew prayer book in the English language, it was certainly the best and finest English translation up to that time.³ The project had been sponsored by the distinguished Anglo-Jewish philanthropist Sir Moses Montefiore.

Montefiore was deeply committed to Judaism and to the perpetuation of its traditions. Aware of the imperfections of previous English translations of the prayer book, he persuaded de Sola to undertake the task intended "to promote among our congregations worship of the Almighty." Thereafter, Montefiore remained involved in the enterprise, suggesting changes and improvements and providing encouragement and financial support.⁴ The Montefiore family, with origins in Leghorn, Italy, was one of the pillars of the Bevis Marks Synagogue. Moses Montefiore (1784-1885) was an exceptionally active member and eventually held all the offices of the congregation. He also served the larger Jewish community as President for forty years of the Board of Deputies

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of British Jews. In that capacity he was the official spokesman for British Jewry and received pleas for help from Jews throughout the world. In many instances he responded personally as well as officially and his travels throughout Europe, Morocco, and the Holy Land on behalf of oppressed Jewry made him the leading Jewish philanthropist of the nineteenth century.

Having made a significant fortune by the age of forty, Montefiore retired from active business and financial enterprises in 1824 and devoted the remainder of his remarkably long life to philanthropy. His motto, "Think and Thank," epitomized his philosophy and that of his equally dedicated wife, Judith, who supported his endeavors and accompanied him in his travels until her death in 1862. Lady Montefiore was an accomplished linguist and author of *The Jewish Manual*, a cookbook that included recipes for soap and cosmetics as well as advice on clothing and jewelry suitable for a lady. She was responsible also for Sir Moses' strict adherence to religious orthodoxy and had been largely influential in persuading him to give up his financial career in favor of philanthropy.⁵

Montefiore cut an impressive figure among the British aristocracy and the foreign dignitaries with whom he dealt. He stood more than six feet, three inches tall, an unusual height for those days, and possessed the self-confidence and acumen necessary for the pursuit of his endeavors. He was knighted by Queen Victoria in 1837 and was later made a baronet. However, life in the highest circles of society did not diminish his commitment to obey the laws of Kashrut or strictly to observe the Sabbath and holy days.⁶

The plight of the depressed and isolated Jewish community in the neglected Ottoman province of Palestine was one of Montefiore's paramount concerns. Between 1827 and 1875 he visited the Holy Land seven times. On the fifth and sixth journeys in 1857 and 1866 he was accompanied by his personal physician, Dr. Thomas Hodgkin, who shared Montefiore's commitment to philanthropy and social reform.⁷

Health conditions in mid-nineteenth century Palestine were deplorable, a situation which, except for the construction of hospitals, was not remedied until after World War I. In Jerusalem the lack of sanitation was appalling, with open sewers running along the unpaved streets, rubbish and refuse everywhere, and dead animals abandoned in various stages of decomposition. Rain water collected in open cisterns during the wet season and was used throughout the remainder of the year, long after it had been polluted. The small group of Jews living in the Jewish Quarter was generally poor, badly housed, and often ill. Cholera, leprosy, malaria, typhoid, dysentery, and other diseases were rife; mortality rates were high. Moreover there were no physicians trained in Western medicine, no dispensaries, and little medical assistance. Hodgkin described Jerusalem as "a poor and miserable place."⁸

Having seen the condition of his co-religionists during his first visit to Jerusalem in 1827, Montefiore was familiar with their dreadful condition. So too was the London Society for Promoting Christianity amongst the Jews, an

organization for whom the conversion of the Jews was the driving force. In 1842 the London Society sent a medically trained missionary, Dr. Edward MacGowen, to Jerusalem to preach the gospel and to deliver medical services to the Jews. MacGowen and his sponsors assumed that the abysmal living conditions of the Jews would make them eager to avail themselves of medical care and susceptible to subtle proselytizing. MacGowen quickly established a dispensary and began to make home visits. Plans were soon underway for a hospital which did not become fully operational until 1844.⁹

Even before the medical missionary arrived, efforts were made to establish a Jewish hospital in Jerusalem. Dr. Ludwig Philippson, a reform-minded rabbi in Magdeburg and editor of the German-Jewish Journal *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judenthums*, promoted the proposal among European Jews and received initial encouragement from the Rothschilds and from Sir Moses Montefiore. However, the plan was opposed by the leaders of Jerusalem's orthodox community as well as by Jewish leaders in Amsterdam who did not wish to cooperate with the reformist rabbi.¹⁰

Montefiore had known about the plans of the London Society to send MacGowen to Jerusalem. He soon learned of the failure of Philippson's scheme. He, however, had a fine working relationship with the orthodox in the Holy Land and in Europe. Fearful of the potential for conversions among the Jews in Jerusalem and well aware of their need for medical care, he decided to act on his own by hiring Dr. Simon Fraenkel, a native of Zulz in Upper Silesia, and sending him to Jerusalem.¹¹

Fraenkel, aged 34, had studied medicine in Munich, and for some time had worked as a practitioner on Dutch ships. Montefiore agreed to pay his salary for three years, as well as his travel expenses to Jerusalem, and to furnish all medicines, instruments, and other essentials necessary for operating a dispensary. Dr. Fraenkel, in return, was to care for the sick free of charge. The Jewish dispensary was not meant to limit its services to Jews—all persons who sought relief were to be helped. As indicated on the cover of the prayer book now in the library of the Hebrew Union College, the gift was bestowed when Fraenkel departed for his new appointment as representative of Montefiore's medical philanthropy in the Holy Land. Though English was not his native tongue and he may well have had a German language prayer book of his own, this prayer book indicated Montefiore's personal kindness and perhaps his hope that it be used to mitigate the missionaries' endeavors.

Fraenkel arrived in Jerusalem in the spring of 1843 and immediately set to work. He set up a dispensary not far from the English Mission Hospital which by then was beginning to attract Jewish patients. Although the primary purpose of the newly-opened hospital was charity and medical care for the community, proselytizing and conversion of the Israelites was a deliberate, overt, and energetic activity—and one that was not totally unsuccessful. The rabbis ordered their congregants not to visit the Mission Hospital but their exhortations were not always heeded. Fraenkel reported that the hospital had

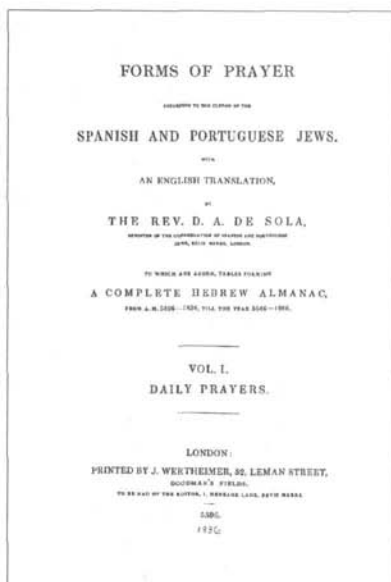
been responsible for the conversion of ten Jews since his arrival.¹² Clearly it was imperative that a Jewish hospital be established to counter the threat.

Fraenkel's appeal for hospital funds was published in Europe and met with limited response. Yet, with help from local Jewry, a house close by the dispensary was rented and adapted for use as a hospital. Fourteen beds were available for the sick, and the building was reported to be well managed and clean. Nonetheless, within a few years, this, the first Jewish hospital in Jerusalem, had disappeared. Rivalries among Jewish leaders in Jerusalem and in Europe diminished support for the project. The Jewish tradition of caring for the sick at home may also have contributed to its demise.¹³ Once again, the English missionaries were the only group providing hospital care. Fraenkel continued his ministrations from the dispensary and although he had been hired initially for three years, his service was regularly extended through the philanthropy of Montefiore. Sir Moses visited the dispensary and approved Fraenkel's work when he was in Jerusalem in 1849, 1855, and again in 1857.

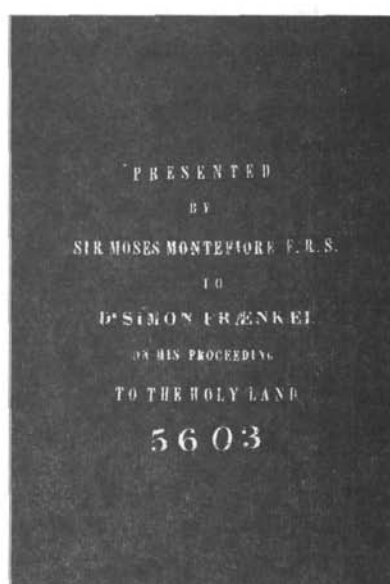
Montefiore, however, continued to hope for a hospital that might eliminate the attraction of the Mission Hospital and provide more complete medical services for the Jews. When he returned to London from Jerusalem in 1849, a visit that reinforced his awareness of the need, he hired architects to design a hospital according to contemporary medical knowledge. In 1854, the project received an unexpected, but essential, boost when Montefiore was named in the will of Judah Touro to administer a bequest of \$60,000 for the benefit of his "unfortunate Jewish brethren in the Holy Land."¹⁴ Touro, a native of Newport, Rhode Island, had been one of the richest and most admired citizens of New Orleans and a notable philanthropist. Touro admired Montefiore's humanitarian work, and it is a tribute to both men that their collaboration was thus assured.

On his fourth visit to Palestine, in 1855, Montefiore used these funds to purchase a plot of land outside Jerusalem's walls, an area where, compared to the crowded city, conditions were more salubrious. This was the first modern acquisition of land in the Holy Land by a Jew. To accomplish it, Sir Moses passed several weeks in Constantinople where he secured the Sultan's permission for the purchase. In Jerusalem he spent endless hours determining the best location for the hospital and in protracted negotiations for its acquisition. On August 15, 1855, an elaborate dedicatory ceremony was held at the site. The various religious groups of Jerusalem were well represented among the thousands who attended. Prayers were offered by Louis Loewe, Montefiore's trusted secretary and confidante, after which Sir Moses and Lady Montefiore laid the foundation stone for the hospital. A tin case containing papers that stated the purpose of the hospital, a copy of the contract for purchase of the land, and names of principal participants in the ceremony, was placed in a hollow of the foundation stone.¹⁵

By this time, however, the French branch of the Rothschild family had provided money for a hospital named in their honor, and there was uncertainty



Title Page of Prayer Book





Sir Moses Montefiore seated before a portrait of Lady Montefiore.

Photograph courtesy of S. W. Massil.



The Almshouse in Jerusalem (Mishkenot Sha'ananim), late 19th century.

Photograph courtesy of S. W. Massil and Ruth Winston-Fox.



Photograph courtesy Guy's Hospital Medical School.

Thomas Hodgkin, M.D. @ 1857 after his return from his journey to Palestine with Sir Moses Montefiore.



Source: Kottek and Schwake, *The First Jewish Hospital in Jerusalem*.

Dr. Simon Fraenkel.

as to the necessity for a second facility. Further quarrels with the rabbis also dampened Montefiore's enthusiasm. When he visited again in 1857 he acquiesced in a plan to construct an almshouse, or dwelling for the poor, on the site of the intended hospital. In time, the almshouse became the first Jewish settlement outside the Old City. The new neighborhood was known as Mishkenot Sha'ananim, Hebrew for "tranquil dwellings," today one of the most peaceful and beautiful areas in Jerusalem.

Dr. Fraenkel remained in Jerusalem until 1858 when he returned to Europe and his dispensary closed. Yet he must have harbored a love for the land of Israel, for he died in Jaffa in 1880.¹⁶ Somehow the prayer book, given to him when he set out for Jerusalem, survived. It serves as a memorial to Fraenkel who was the first Jewish physician to provide Western medical service in Jerusalem and to Sir Moses Montefiore whose vision, determination, and compassion enabled that brief episode to occur.

NOTES

1. David de Aaron de Sola, *Forms of Prayer According to the Custom of the Spanish and Portuguese Jews . . .*, (London, 5596 [1836]: J. Wertheimer), Vol. I. *The Jewish Encyclopedia* states that there were six volumes in the set. The prayer book, given to Manfred Waserman when he lived in Israel, was donated by him to the Hebrew Union College - Jewish Institute of Religion in Cincinnati in 1995.
2. "David de Aaron de Sola," *The Jewish Encyclopedia* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1901-1906), 12 vols.; "Sola, De [family]," *Encyclopedia Judaica* (Jerusalem: Encyclopedia Judaica, 1971), 16 vols.
3. The first translation of any importance was made by David Levi and appeared in 1789. De Sola noted that although the Levi translation was literally correct, it lacked "taste," especially in the poetical portions. *Forms of Prayer*, I: xiii.
4. *Forms of Prayer*, I: i-ii.
5. For Lady Montefiore see Sonia L. Lipman, "Judith Montefiore—First Lady of Anglo-Jewry," *Transactions of the Jewish Historical Society of England*, Vol. 21, 1968.
6. The literature on Montefiore is extensive. Sonia and V. D. Lipman, eds., *The Century of Moses Montefiore* (London and New York: Oxford University Press, 1985) is an excellent one-volume source. See also Louis Loewe (ed.), *Diaries of Sir Moses and Lady Montefiore* (London: Griffith, Farran, Okeden & Welsh, 1890, facsimile edition London, 1983).
7. Amalie M. Kass and Edward H. Kass, *Perfecting the World; the Life and Times of Dr. Thomas Hodgkin, 1798-1866* (Boston: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1988). Hodgkin's contributions to medical knowledge included a description of the simultaneous enlargement of the spleen and lymphatic glands, now universally known as "Hodgkin's Disease." Hodgkin became seriously ill during his journey with Montefiore in 1866 and died in Jaffa where he was buried in the Protestant cemetery. Montefiore, "overwhelmed . . . with sorrow" by the loss of his close friend and associate of more than 40 years, had a six-foot red granite obelisk erected over the grave. The grave site can be visited today and groups of physicians and tourists regularly do so.
8. Yehoshua Ben-Arieh, *Jerusalem in the 19th Century, the Old City* (New York: St. Martin's Press and Jerusalem: Yad Izhak Ben Zvi Institute, 1984), pp. 90-101; Tudor Parfitt, *The Jews in Palestine 1800-1882* (London: Royal Historical Society, 1987), pp. 13-14.
9. Amalie M. Kass, "Western Medicine in Nineteenth-Century Jerusalem," *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences* 44 (Oct. 1989): 447-461; W. T. Gidney, *The History of the London Society for Promoting Christianity Amongst the Jews: From 1809 to 1908* (London: London Society for Promoting Christianity Amongst the Jews, 1908); W. Ayerst, *The Jews of the Nineteenth Century: A Collection of Essays, Reviews, and Historical Notices* (London: B. Wertheim, 1848).

10. Samuel S. Kottek and Norbert Schwake, "The First Jewish Hospital in Jerusalem," *Medicine's Geographic Heritage* 4 (Dec. 1988): 3–10; A. Schischa, "The Saga of 1855: A Study in Depth," in Lipman and Lipman (eds.), *Century of Moses Montefiore*, pp. 269–346.
11. It is probable that Fraenkel was hired at the suggestion of Dr. Louis Loewe, Montefiore's secretary and confidant, who also came from Zulz. See Raphael Loewe, "Louis Loewe: Aide and Confidant," in Lipman and Lipman (eds.), *Century of Moses Montefiore*, pp. 104–117.
12. Kottek and Schwake, "First Jewish Hospital," pp. 3–10.
13. Kottek and Schwake, "First Jewish Hospital," pp. 3–10. It should be pointed out however, that until the twentieth century, hospital care was almost entirely confined to the poor in Europe and the United States. Even those families that had minimal financial resources cared for their sick members at home.
14. Schischa, "Saga"; *Diaries*, 2: 24–25.
15. Schischa, "Saga," p. 320.
16. Kottek and Schwake, *op. cit.*, p.9.

On the Hasidic Parable

ARYEH WINEMAN

AN IMPRESSIVE COLLECTION OF PARABLES CAN BE FOUND in the hasidic homilies of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries—the written notes of sermonic teachings and lectures which comprise our major source for knowledge of classical hasidic teaching and thought. It is worth noting that a parable is not a logical argument. Like any analogy, a parable accentuates certain similarities while it glosses over potentially crucial differences.¹ But if the hasidic parable does not present a logical case, it achieves something else. Through its structure, it entices the mind to entertain the possibility of a different perspective on its subject. The hasidic parable subtly expands parameters and, in the process, beliefs about reality, life, the cosmos, God and self are open to change. The parable-form has its roots in oral tradition and folk-literature; the prevalence of parables in many early hasidic homilies is a mark of the oral context of hasidic teaching. In contrast with earlier stages of the Jewish mystic tradition in which teachings were transmitted essentially via written texts, hasidic teaching was delivered orally. Students or followers heard, rather than read, the master's discourse,² and that kind of oral context quite naturally fostered the use of parables.

Parables are not necessarily alike in character or in function. Different cultural contexts have made their own particular use of the parable form, and the phenomenon of parable within Jewish literature bears out this diversity of function. In classical rabbinic sources, parables were utilized largely to make a case for the legitimacy and validity of a particular reading of a biblical verse. The purpose of the parable was hence midrashic in character.³ While the parables found in hasidic homilies almost always follow the bipartite form which mark the earlier rabbinic parables—the story, *mashal*, followed by the *nimshal*, its explanation and application⁴—the hasidic parable nevertheless differs markedly from the earlier talmudic or midrashic parable.

Often in the most significant and striking hasidic parables, the reader can generally detect an *a priori* premise which is presented as a prevalent and logical or acceptable way of thinking, even as a common sense mode of thought. That initial premise might be spelled out explicitly, but even when not it is nonetheless fairly evident. Then, by means of the parable, that same initial premise is negated in favor of a much more radical way of understanding the pertinent subject. The *a priori* premise comes to be regarded as a surface-

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perception while the alternative view emerging through the negation of surface approaches the same subject with significantly greater depth. This kind of basic structure lends the parable a polemical character, even though the parables were spoken by the hasidic master or teacher in addressing his own students or followers. The *a priori* premises of hasidic parables are frequently identified with the accepted norms of Jewish religious life and society and of talmudic study in Eastern Europe as the hasidic teachers perceived them. The structure of the parable leads to a transformation of thinking and feeling which might alter the listener's understanding of religious life and of his relationship to himself and to God, to life, and the world.⁵

The hasidic parable can hence be likened to a guide who directs a person from one level of understanding or awareness to a higher level. This is sometimes true both in many instances of simple analogy and in parables with more developed and complex narrative content. The analogy serves as a lens through which one can view the actual subject in a very different light from the way one would ordinarily view it apart from or prior to hearing the analogy, and the goal of the parable is nothing less than a transformation of one's grasp of the subject discussed.

Though the form and function of this kind of parable flourished in eighteenth-century Hasidism as a distinct vehicle of hasidic teaching, this type of parable is also found in older sources. One illuminating example of this same type of parable is found in the Zohar, which antedated eighteenth-century Hasidism by some five centuries.

The Zohar presents the following parable: A king had a son whom he sent away to a village so that there he might grow up until he would be capable of learning the ways of the Royal Palace. When the king later hears that his son has already matured, what does he do? Out of love for his son he sends the boy's mother—the Matron, a woman of rank—to bring him to the palace so that there the king might rejoice each day in the company of his son. What appears to be a story of maturation turns out upon reflection to be a parable on death.

So it is that the Holy One, blessed be He, and the Matron had a son, and who is it?—the higher holy soul.⁶ And He sent it to a village—to this world—to grow up there and to learn the ways of the Royal Palace. When the King is told that the son has in fact now matured in that village and that the time has come to bring him to the Palace, what does He do, considering His love for his son? He sends the Matron⁷ to bring their son up to the Palace. Similarly, the soul does not ascend from this world until the Matron herself comes and brings it up to the King's Palace where it then dwells for all time.

Nevertheless it is the way of the world that we villagers weep with the departure of the King's son. One wise person who has there, however, asked us, "Why are you weeping? Is he not the King's son? It is not fitting that he continue to live among us, for his true place is in his father's palace."

. . . Were the righteous and wise to grasp this, they would instead rejoice on that day when it is time for one to depart and ascend from this world, for is it

not an honor for a person that the Matron comes for him to bring him to the Royal Palace that the King might thereupon rejoice with him day after day?⁸

In earlier rabbinic parables⁹ the reader or hearer identifies instinctively with the position of the wise man, which often contrasts with that of the fools referred to in the same parable. In this zoharic parable—which can serve for our purposes as a prototype of the hasidic parable—the wise man’s position contrasts instead with the conventional, common-sense *a priori* premise with which the reader is initially expected to identify—in this case, the sense of death as evoking sadness. The wise man’s insight radically negates not only the villagers’ but also the reader’s expected understanding of what has occurred.

That same essential structure marks the following parable told by Yitshak of Radvil:

A great king made for himself a royal crown and prepared a vessel in which to hide the crown so that it would remain in good condition. The shape of the container, it stands to reason, is also beautiful, and in it are tiny openings so that through them the crown may be seen. And when people come to the king’s palace and see the container, the fool thinks, “how lovely is this vessel,” for he lacks the wisdom to grasp that the real object of value is not the container but rather the crown; that which is inside (the inner) is the essential. The wise man, however, “with eyes in his head”¹⁰ thinks, “Certainly the container is not the real feature,” and he squints to gaze through the tiny holes until he is able to see the crown and greater delight in it.¹¹

We note that the king¹² does not seek to conceal the crown completely; one must however make a distinct effort to note what is within the container. This effort flows from the insight that the inner rather than the external is of primary significance. The vessel containing the crown might suggest the world itself in which the divine vitality is present, though concealed, giving life and existence to all that is.¹³ The container might allude also to the traditional matrix of Torah-study and mitzvot: the wise one, possessing spiritual insight and illumination, is not satisfied with the framework in itself but rather seeks, through mitzvot and the study of Torah, to focus upon and attach himself to their inner dimension. That impulse to go beyond the surface-aspect of holy acts and of sacred texts in order to experience their deeper, inner dimension is basic to classical Hasidism. The parable directs the listener to proceed beyond surface-perceptions both of the world and of religious life and to seek a deeper, more inner aspect of both.

The following parable was told by Rabbi Levi Yitshak of Berditchev.

The king commanded a servant to learn the tactics of war, how to hold a gun and how to position oneself vis-à-vis those fighting against him in war and taking aim at him. Now during the time of instruction, no fire had been placed in the gun, for then there was no need for fire. But later this same man takes the weapon with him as he goes to war and stands in the correct position and uses the weapon just as he had done previously while learning, without placing any fire in the weapon, while those fighting him easily defeated him and mocked him.¹⁴

The *mashal* is then explained in that God gave to us a Torah “written with black fire upon white fire,”¹⁵ for such fire is necessary to combat the evil inclination within a person. The *mitzvot* given us in the Torah have effect only when we fulfill them with *hitlahavut* (enthusiasm, inner fire) as we connect with the innerness of the *mitzvah*. But if we perform the same acts *kemitsvat anashim melumdah*, in a mindless, perfunctory manner, simply following the given instructions and going through the correct motions, then those same deeds—like the weapon without fire-power—lack all effect and value.

A basic thrust of eighteenth-century Hasidism was a protest against what it perceived as an idiom of Torah-study and religious observance divorced from a deeper dimension of spiritual experience. While in no way negating the crucial ingredients of Torah-study and *mitzvot* in religious life, Hasidism insisted that both study and the performance of commanded deeds be infused with spirituality and serve as a means to *devekut*, to an inner attachment to the divine; and Hasidism furthermore seriously questioned the value of study and *mitzvot* when they do not connect with a very real and intense God-awareness.¹⁶ The parable suggests the position of the Maggid of Mezhibezh that the primary divine service in fulfilling a *mitzvah* is precisely the *hitlahavut* present in the deed, the actual deed itself being necessary solely for the reason that inner intent and enthusiasm themselves, the spiritual fire, require a vessel to garb them.¹⁷

Rabbi Moshe Hayyim Efrayim of Sedilikov, a grandson of the Baal Shem Tov, told the following parable:

A king constructed a network of barriers on the way leading to his palace so that none might enter there; he hid in the palace, while placing walls and fire and rivers—all of them illusions—on the way leading to the palace-entrance. The wise person, pondering what he saw, asked himself how it is possible that his merciful father would wish to hide from his beloved children. All this must indeed be a mere illusion, and the father is testing whether his son will make the effort to come to him. Immediately as the son plunged himself into the river surrounding the palace, the illusion vanished and he proceeded onward also through all the other barriers until he arrived at the king’s palace, while a fool, fearful of high walls and fire, would instead turn around and return home.¹⁸

While this parable is found in several different versions in early hasidic texts, perhaps the clearest statement of the *nimshal* (explication) is that found following a version of the same parable as told by Rabbi Ya’akov Yosef of Polonoye.

The great King, the King of Kings, conceals Himself within numerous barriers and walls of iron . . . the barriers are “extraneous thoughts” along with all that causes neglect of Torah-study and prayer. . . . People of understanding realize that all the barriers and iron walls and all the garments and coverings are of His own Self and Being, as there is nothing devoid of His Presence.¹⁹

The parable’s implicit initial premise regards the barriers to God as real. These include those barriers which a Jew encounters within himself, his own

inability to pray, and his extraneous thoughts (*mahshavot zarot*) which come his way when he consciously seeks to attach himself to God in prayer. These barriers are indeed experienced as real. By means of the parable, however, the listener considers the possibility that contrary to his way of experiencing things, God's Presence is everywhere, within everything, even with a person's undesirable, disturbing thoughts which nonetheless contain at their core an exiled holy spark.

As ultimately there is nothing but God, the divine is present even within those barriers which lack the quality of independent being. This parable voices a way of thinking at the core of classical hasidic teaching, one which clearly runs against the grain of what people generally experience as a "common-sense" view of the world. The parable is an instrument which brings a person to view both the reality about him and his own psychological makeup in an emphatically different way.

And in a collection of homilies of the Maggid, Dov Baer of Mezhirech, one finds the following parable:

A soldier appearing to summon a person to the king came with great anger, evoking fear. His very garments evoked fear, and the person was, indeed, afraid of him. In truth, however there is no reason to fear this messenger: his clothing is but a sign of his royal service, and in his own right he is nothing; the fear which he incites is the fear and the awe of the king. A wise person will have no fear of the messenger or of speaking to him; instead, he will simply proceed in haste to the king. Or it sometimes happens that a messenger from the king behaves in a very friendly way. A fool takes pleasure in the messenger and responds to his friendly words. The wise person, in contrast, knows that what is essential is the king's will itself, and so he thinks, why should I delay by conversing and taking delight in him. I will proceed at once to the essential matter, to the real source of friendship and love, and so he goes directly to the king without giving any thought to the messenger.²⁰

The Maggid provides the following explanation of the parable,

In this manner, whatever befalls one in life, happenings evoking either love or fear, that person will go to the King, the Holy One, blessed be He, and will elevate all his responses (of fear and love) to a higher plane. Whether something happens causing him fear or injury, or whether joy and delight come his way, he will raise both fear and love upward to the King on high—unlike the fool who delights and plays and eats and drinks and spends time with the messenger whom the King has sent to him.²¹

The *a priori* premises are represented here by the fool who attaches importance to what he experiences and to what happens to him in life. That premise is so basic and pervasive in life that an abstract statement stating an alternative way of thinking would be powerless to persuade us; the alternative idea is truly grasped only via the parable which turns that conventional, "common-sense" view on its head.

The wise person in this parable represents a transcendent perspective. In the context of hasidic thought, rooted in its reading of the Kabbalistic *sefirot*,

both fear, including displeasure and all that brings distress, torment, insecurity, and love, including one's good fortune and happiness in life, are in truth displaced divine qualities. With this realization the focus is removed from the immediate causes of distress or happiness and placed, instead, upon God who speaks to a person through all that happens to him or her in life. The pattern shatters the expected and normative ego-centeredness of a person's outlook; and even consideration of future divine reward and punishment, it is pointed out, becomes irrelevant. The inner structure of this parable is the same as the previous examples. Each parable contains an initial implicit premise presumed to be an acceptable, even the acceptable point-of-view, which the parable then proceeds to overturn.

In a Yiddish folk-parable²² told in the name of the Maggid of Dubno, the naked Truth found no acceptance and walked around rejected until Parable lent Truth its own beautifully colored garments. Then, associated with Parable, Truth found favor in everyone's eyes. That folktale perceives Parable as the embellishment of an idea. Parable, it would seem, makes a point more striking and appealing, more interesting for the hearer or the reader, even though the truth itself, without the same appeal, could be stated independently of the parable and would in itself make sense.

In scattered references to the nature of the parable-form found in hasidic texts, we encounter the contrasting idea that truth is sometimes accessible only via the parable, which is an indispensable instrument for grasping the idea expressed through it. "Without the parable, (the listener) would not grasp the idea nor accept it because it is distant from common sense, and it is for this reason that the same person did not accept the idea prior to hearing the parable."²³

Not infrequently one comes across this comment in hasidic texts: "In order to draw something nearer to the mind, we employ a parable."²⁴ Since human consciousness is often limited in its spiritual and mental grasp, a parable has the potential to enable listeners to comprehend what otherwise they would be unable to fathom; it is indispensable in bringing an idea within the realm of understanding. In this vein, Rabbi Yitshak of Radvil explained that paradoxically only through the concrete garb or covering (mashal) is one able to grasp the more abstract idea (nimshal) conveyed in the parable,²⁵—just as the human eye can gaze at the bright sun only through a curtain or veil.²⁶

NOTES

1. Edward P. J. Corbett, *Classical Rhetoric* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965), pp. 77, 104.

2. "Hasidic teaching is basically oral rather than a book-literary culture." Moshe Idel, "Reification of Language in Jewish Mysticism," in *Mysticism and Language*, edited by Steven Katz (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 56. See also Zeev Gries, *Sefer, sofer, vesippur bereshit hahasidut* (haKibbutz haMe'uhad, 1992), p. 64.

3. Clemens Thoma, "Literary and Theological Aspects of the Rabbinic Parables," in *Parable and Story in Judaism and Christianity*, edited by Clemens Thoma and Michael Wyschogrod (New York: Paulist Press, 1989), pp. 28–29; David Stern, *Parables in Midrash—Narrative and Exegesis in Rabbinic*

Literature (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), p. 7. In Canticles Rabbah 1.1.8, it is stated succinctly that “by means of a parable one arrives at the true meaning of the words of the Torah.”

4. Stern, 9; and on p. 69 he locates the literary art of the rabbinic parable in the subtle disparities between the *mashal* and the *nimshal*.

5. Paul Ricoeur conceives of parable as, like metaphor, having the capacity to “re-define and re-describe reality,” *Semeia* IV (“Biblical Hermeneutics,” 1975), 75, 89. Note the discussion of Ricoeur’s position in David Stern, “Jesus’ Parables from the Perspective of Rabbinic Literature: The Example of the Wicked Husbandman,” *Parable and Story in Judaism and Christianity*, edited by Clemens Thoma and Michael Wyschogrod (New York: Paulist Press, 1989), p. 50.

6. The highest aspect of the complex human soul as delineated in zoharic psychology.

7. The Shekhinah.

8. Zohar I, 245b.

9. BT Shabbat 153a.

10. Ecc 2:14.

11. ‘*Or yitshak* (Jerusalem: Al heharim, 1961, published from an old manuscript), p. 11.

12. This parable, like many others, echoes the much older tradition of the king-mashal which dominated the later rabbinic parables. The king-*mashal* is discussed in Ignaz Zeigler, *Die Königslehnisse des Midrasch—beleuchtet durch die römische Kaiserzeit* (1903) and in Stern, *Parables in Midrash*, pp. 19–21.

13. “Do not look at the flask . . .” (Mishna Avot 4:27), “for the essence of everything that is in the world is the spirituality within it which comes from God who gives it existence.” *Likutim yekarim* (Lemberg, 1792; Jerusalem: Toledot Aharon, 1974), #192.

14. *Kedushat levi* (Berdichev, 1811), *Likutim, Kedushat levi hashalem* (Jerusalem: Torat hanetsah, 1993), p. 305.

15. Canticles Rabbah 5.11.6.

16. Rabbi Schneur Zalman, founder of the HaBaD school of hasidic thought, differed from more mainstream classical hasidic teaching in this respect. See *Tanya* I, ch. 4, and Rifka Schatz-Uffenheimer, *Hasidism and Mysticism—Quietistic Elements in Eighteenth Century Hasidic Thought* (Princeton: Magnes and Princeton University Presses, 1993) pp. 256, 280–289, where the author described the position of Rabbi Schneur Zalman as “anti-hasidic.”

17. *Shemu’ah tovah* (Warsaw, 1938), 36b, quoted in Schatz-Uffenheimer, p. 113.

18. Moses Hayyim Efrayim of Sedilikov, *Degel mahane efrayim* (Mezebov, 1810), *Vayelekh*.

19. *Beit porat yosef* (1781; Petrokov, 1884, 111a) from the homily for *Shabbat hagadol*.

20. *Maggid devarav leya’akov* (Koretz, 1781; edited by Rifka Schatz-Uffenheimer, Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1976, #161, 261–262). Also found in *Likutim yekarim* (1974), #98.

21. This *nimshal* is found in both the above-mentioned texts.

22. *Yiddish Folktales*, edited by Beatrice Silverman Weinreich, translated by Leonard Wolf (New York: Pantheon and YIVO, 1988), p. 7.

23. *Likutim yekarim* (1974), #158.

24. ‘*Or torah* (Lublin, 1810), *Vayera*.

25. ‘*Or yitshak*, 111.

26. *Ibid.*, Introduction, p. 5.

Teaching Jewish Studies

With this essay, we inaugurate a new department for JUDAISM, which will engage issues, methods, and assumptions central to the teaching of Jewish Studies.

Salo Baron and Jewish Studies

ROBERT LIBERLES

THE LATE SALO BARON RETIRED FROM THE MILLER CHAIR AT Columbia University in 1963, two years after his appearance at the Eichmann trial in Jerusalem, and some 33 years after assuming the chair in the fall of 1930. Following the appointment of Harry Wolfson at Harvard, the Miller Chair represented the second position at an American university in Jewish studies and the first chair in Jewish History. Throughout his Columbia career, Baron was recognized as the dean of Jewish historians in America and head of the most significant program for the academic training of graduate students in the field.

Baron was born in Tarnow in Galicia in 1895 and died in November 1989 in New York. He came from an orthodox and intellectually enlightened family that was among the wealthiest of the Jewish community in Tarnow. The primary languages in the house were Polish and German. Private tutors gave Baron instruction in both secular and Jewish subjects. After matriculation, he studied in Cracow and then in Vienna, where he received three doctorates: History (1917), Political Science (1922), and Jurisprudence (1923). He also continued his Jewish studies at the rabbinical seminary in Vienna, and soon became an instructor in Jewish History at Vienna's Jewish Teachers College.

At the time of Baron's migration from Vienna in 1926 and his subsequent appointment to Columbia, Jewish studies stood at a crossroads. A number of Jewish scholars were already doubtful of the future of their endeavors in Europe and relocating both to America and to Palestine. European seminaries were hardly lacking for students during the twenties; interest in Judaica was blossoming. But strapped for funds, the heads of these institutions were reluctantly letting their scholars go.

In 1926, Baron was brought to America as a visiting professor of Jewish History, by Stephen Wise, noted Zionist leader, a founder of the American Jewish Congress, and President of the Jewish Institute of Religion in New York. He quickly gained attention for his revisionist writings, most especially an essay "Ghetto and Emancipation," published in the *Menorah Journal* in 1928, in which he first attacked what he called the "lachrymose conception of Jewish history."

In 1930, he assumed the Miller Chair in Jewish History, Literature, and Institutions at Columbia. Baron married Jeannette Meisel of New York City, a doctoral student in Economics at Columbia, in 1934. Until her death in 1985, she worked closely with Baron, providing considerable assistance in the preparation of

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his manuscripts. In 1934, they acquired a second residence in Canaan, Conn., where Baron was able to accomplish a great deal of his prolific writing in semi-isolation.

Baron's best known work, *A Social and Religious History of the Jews*, appeared in two editions. The original three-volume edition (1937) covered the entire scope of Jewish history from the Biblical period through the early Nazi years that hovered over the time of publication. The unfinished eighteen-volume second edition (1952–83) covers only the ancient and medieval periods, ending in 1650.

Baron continued to write considerably on the medieval period in later years, but the origin of that interest during the war was no accident. His scholarly focus on medieval times during the war years derived in part from Baron's desire to reaffirm his critique of the lachrymose conception despite contemporary developments. He also sought to elucidate the historical role played by scholars during times of crisis. With all this, Baron hardly concealed himself in a medieval citadel and much of his writing at this time concerned itself much more directly with contemporary affairs.

The Nazi occupation of Poland caught both his parents and one sister in his home town of Tarnow in Galicia. Baron failed in his attempts through the American authorities to arrange for their migration. Although the family was killed in Tarnow in June 1942, Baron was not sure of their fate until after the war, and a spirit of muted optimism remained in both his scholarly and communal writings during those years.

During the Nazi years, Baron, renowned for his long hours and intensive working habits, became especially productive in his writing, while simultaneously exerting numerous efforts to assist family and friends still in Europe. It was during the war years that Baron became particularly involved in writing on the medieval period. In addition to the appearance of the three-volume *The Jewish Community, its History and Structure to the American Revolution* in 1942, Baron issued during the early forties a series of essays dealing with leading medieval rabbinical personalities including Rashi, Saadiah Gaon, Yehudah HaLevi, and Maimonides, his synthetic study on "The Jewish Factor in Medieval Civilization," and his classic article, "Modern Capitalism and Jewish Fate."

It was also during these years that he wrote his first essays on American Jewish history and began to encourage graduate students to write in what was then an entirely new field. By the end of the forties, Baron was identified as a leading figure in the new discipline. In 1949, he delivered a far reaching address to the American Jewish Historical Society on problems and major issues facing those who wished to undertake research. In 1953, he was elected president of the Society, his term coinciding with the Tercentenary celebrations of American Jewish life in which he took an active role.

Baron's interest in American Jewish History during the forties also derived from the wartime context. As he realized that American Jewry would now have to inherit the mantle of world Jewish leadership, Baron sought to place its historical experience within the broader context of Jewish history. It was crucial to Baron's outlook that American Jewry not be perceived as an outside entity imposed upon the continuum of Jewish history.

In addition to scholar and teacher, Salo Baron was an enormously active man of Jewish affairs. He was long-time president of the Conference of Jewish Social Studies and editor of its journal *Jewish Social Studies* from its inception in 1939 until

his death. He also served as president of the American Jewish Historical Society from 1953–55 and intermittently of the American Academy for Jewish Research.

Baron had stopped observing traditional Jewish practices as an adult, but, in his writings, he continued to affirm the importance of religion in the preservation of Jewish life. He also supported a number of Zionist efforts, especially the Hebrew University, although his position on the historical and continued significance of the Diaspora caused disagreements with some Israeli scholars, like Yitzchak Baer, who insisted on stronger recognition of the centrality of Israel's role in Jewish life past and present.

In 1961, Baron attained wide-spread attention when he was called as one of the opening witnesses in the war crimes trial against Adolf Eichmann conducted in Jerusalem. Presenting a masterly summation of the course of European Jewish history during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Baron depicted a resourceful European Jewish community that had demonstrated considerable ingenuity in combating the critical conditions of the inter-war period.

During his retirement years, Baron worked primarily on the revised edition of the *Social and Religious History* until the death of his wife Jeannette in 1985. He then began work on his memoirs, which remained unfinished at the time of his death in 1989.

Baron established three basic historical principles which continue to be identified with his name: his critique of the lachrymose conception of Jewish history; his study of the interrelationship between social and religious forces in Jewish history; and his emphasis on the interaction between the Jewish community and the societies in which Jews lived.

What brought Baron to the conclusion that suffering was being overemphasized by most presentations of the Jewish past? Two answers lie before us: one suggested by Yitzchak Baer in his 1938 review of the *Social and Religious History* that Baron like other Jewish apologetes had been influenced by the anti-Semitic argument that Jews excessively bemoan their fate; the other and virtually opposite explanation suggested by Baron himself in his response to Baer, that he had been motivated by a combination of historical principles and Jewish self-pride.¹ Twenty-five years later in his 1963 "Newer Emphases in Jewish History," Baron put it this way, reflecting the double motif of historiographic and personal considerations: "I too am a child of this age [that witnessed the Nazi period]. All my life I have been struggling against the hitherto dominant "lachrymose conception of Jewish history"—a term which I have been using for more than forty years—because I have felt that an overemphasis on Jewish sufferings distorted the total picture of the Jewish historic evolution and, at the same time, badly served a generation which had become impatient with the nightmare of endless persecutions and massacres."²

In fact, Baron was not alone or even the first to declare his discontent with the emphasis on the role of suffering and persecutions in Jewish history. Dubnow had written in a similar vein in the 1925 introduction to his *World History*. Even earlier, more popular historiography focused far more on accomplishments and contributions than on restrictions and persecutions.³ The fact is that Graetz's style of writing history, with its two heavy hands on scholarship and suffering, was criticized from the outset, especially—and in this sense Baer was correct—by those who pursued and defended an expanded Jewish role within the surrounding

society. Baer called this a symptom of apologetics; Baron, an act of self-pride. It might also be called a post-emancipation way of looking at the Jewish past.

One of the important implications of Baron's position was his aversion to historical explanations rooted in anti-Semitism. Two such examples, almost simultaneous in their occurrence, were the rise of Zionism and the beginnings of the mass migration of Eastern European Jewry to America in the later decades of the nineteenth century. Baron argued that the primary cause of the migration of Russian Jews was not the pogroms of 1881 and after, but rather the deteriorating economic conditions prompted by continued restrictions and rapid population growth, as well as technological advancement in international navigation and the lower costs of these trips. Noting that emigration figures began to climb already during the 1870s, Baron declared that "Even without the Russian pogrom wave of 1881, emigration to America would have been inevitable."⁴

Of course, the validity of Baron's revision also required attention to the migration of other groups as well. In this way, Baron liberated the migration from a specifically Jewish context that was closely entwined with anti-Semitic causation. Baron emphasized that while the number of Jewish migrants increased in subsequent decades, the percentage of Jews within the Russian migration decreased over time, again implying that the specifically Jewish element in the migration played only a limited role.

In the second example, concerning the rise of Zionism, Baron was one of the first to question the tight conceptual bond between the emergence of Zionism and the growth of anti-Semitic movements and especially the Russian pogroms. In Baron's formulation, Zionism was not a reaction against anti-Semitism, but rather emerged out of a realistic confrontation with grave economic and social problems. Its growth was stimulated by the development of European nationalism.⁵

Both of these examples also demonstrate a conceptual difficulty in mitigating the anti-Semitic factor in explaining the course of Jewish history. Concerning the migration movement from Russia to the west, the question must still arise what prompted such considerable Jewish receptivity to the migration movement? In other words, didn't Baron's emphasis on broader economic suffering and technological and commercial advances do more to explain what enabled the movement to occur within the general population, rather than explain the considerable and still disproportionate Jewish receptivity to these developments? And concerning the rise of Zionism, how removed are such concepts as alienation and frustration from an explanatory catchword called "anti-Semitism"? Given these difficulties in reducing the role of anti-Semitism in describing and explaining Jewish history, it is not surprising that Baron himself was not always consistent regarding the place of tragedy and persecution in Jewish history. In one well-known work in particular, *The Russian Jew Under Tsars and Soviets*, suffering fills its pages.

Of course, the most serious difficulty of all with the anti-lachrymose critique came with the Holocaust. In fact, at one point at least, in a 1963 essay, "Newer Emphases in Jewish History," Baron himself lamented the decline of the lachrymose perspective. In a remarkable passage, which juxtaposes the lachrymose concept with social historical perspectives, Baron reversed his usual prescription: "Yet it is to be hoped that this newer emphasis on politics, economics and military affairs . . . will not totally displace the understanding for the Leidens- und Gelehrten-geschichte which had so completely dominated Jewish historical writ-

ing of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.”⁶ It might be relevant to note that the essay was prepared not long after Baron’s testimony at the Eichmann trial, an event which deeply affected Baron on a personal level.

But aside from any second thoughts that he may have had, Baron’s principal response to post-Holocaust criticism was that the main thrust of his intended revisionist work was to unlock hidden and undiscovered doors of Jewish history that had remained covered by thick veils of the orientation toward suffering. Of course, persecutions had left their deep mark on the Jewish historical experience, but multiple dimensions of that experience had remained unexplored or unappreciated, and it was this which Baron sought to correct.

As a result, Baron appreciated early on the significance of American Jewish history. Not only did he seek to help establish the position of American Jewry within world Jewry, but also tried to show how it was a laboratory for the study of Jewish history with considerable less emphasis on the lachrymose patterns. Even more important for the lachrymose critique was his revisionist perspective on the nature of the medieval period in Jewish history.

The juxtaposition between the lachrymose critique and the need for a social history of the Jews was emphasized by Baron already in his early historiographic writings. In his 1931 essay on Graetz, Baron put it this way: “In general, he [Graetz] interpreted the history of the Jews in the Diaspora almost exclusively in terms of a ‘history of sufferings and scholars’ and hence paid little attention to economic and social history.”⁷ In 1939, Baron underlined Dubnow’s failure to write a true sociological history and thereby his failure to avoid the trappings posed by a lachrymose history.⁸ There was little elaboration, but the point of contrast had been made again: overemphasis on suffering prevented a true appreciation of the full Jewish historical experience. Thus, Graetz’s formula that despite all the suffering, Jews had remained intellectually and spiritually creative was insufficient for Baron because it did not amply revise the historical portrait of the Jews’ status within society at large.

Baron’s historiographic position also emphasized the reciprocal relations of social and religious forces. The innovation in Baron’s work lay in his extensive inclusion of social factors, but not in his exclusion of the religious dimension. His approach was exemplified by the title he had chosen for his own history of the Jews. What did Baron actually mean by his title of *A Social and Religious History of the Jews*? The tendencies of twentieth-century historiography toward multi-faceted presentations had found expression in titles; among the best known works with similar titles to that of Baron’s from that time are those of Columbia’s well-known historian Carlton Hayes: *A Political and Social History of Modern Europe* (1923) and *A Political and Cultural History of Modern Europe* (1936). Hayes was at the time chairman of the Department of History. Of course, Baron’s title revealed that here too the reader would find a work of history examined from multiple perspectives. If in the mainstream of world historiography the new approach came to correct an overemphasis on political, diplomatic, and military aspects, in the sphere of Jewish history it was the intellectual and religious aspects that had not been focused on since the beginnings of German Wissenschaft a century before.

At the very outset of the *Social and Religious History*, Baron argued that Jews and Judaism are dependent upon each other. “The unity of Jews and Judaism thus has a deep meaning and the interrelation between the two, the interplay of the

social and religious forces throughout the entire course of Jewish history, appears to be of controlling significance.”⁹ In asserting the legitimacy of the religious factor in history, Baron was joining forces with Max Weber and in a sense with Werner Sombart as well. In Baron’s view, economic determinism had overplayed its hand, and a synthetic view was more strongly desired.

But there is another and non-historiographic way to understand the title of Baron’s work. The original title was *Jews and Judaism*, and its opening pages make clear that Baron was postulating an organic mutually dependent connection between the people and their religion.

His position in this context is not purely historiographic, but also revealed his thinking on the inner nature of Jewish life. In the introduction to the *Social and Religious History*, Baron wrote, “The intrinsic unity of Jews and Judaism has been somewhat obscured in recent generations.” He referred first to the Reform Movement, which “at least in the earliest formulations, tried to emphasize more and more strongly the universal element in the Jewish religion. In consequence, the Jewish people as a whole lost its essential standing within the Jewish creed.” Meanwhile, “Zionism and other Jewish national movements laid increasing stress upon the secular aspects of the Jewish people, often trying to detach the national being of the Jews from their religion.” Baron saw both extremes as inaccurate presentations of Jewish history. In the past, nationalism has proven to be an integral part of Jewish religion; and in the future, religion will have to be just as important a part of nationalism. “In the opinion of numerous observers, however, it is very likely that, just as Jewish nationality represented a vital element in the Jewish religion of former days, so the Jewish religious heritage will soon be more generally recognized, under one shape or another, as an integral part of Jewish nationalism.”¹⁰

Baron warned that a secular nationalism devoid of Judaism’s religious characteristics would result in schisms and a general dysfunctioning of the community. He called for a synthetic path between the classical position of Reform and that of Zionism. “Should secular Jewish nationalism really prevail [in Palestine] in the end, and for the first time in history divorce the Jewish people from its religion, the possibility of a deep schism in Jewry would become real, the ultimate effects of which cannot be foreseen.”¹¹

At the beginning of *The Jewish Community*, Baron again distinguished between the positions of Reform on one side and national movements on the other. He explained that Eastern European Diaspora nationalism headed by Chaim Zhitlowsky and historian Simon Dubnow sought to transform the community from a religious institution into a *Volksgemeinde*, whose security would be guaranteed by a program of national minority rights.¹² Baron argued that this position overlooked the continued vitality of the religious factor in Jewish life.

In sum, when in the 1930s Baron referred to a social and religious history of the Jews, he was expressing his personal perspective not only on the nature of Jewish life in the past, but simultaneously indicating his views on what was required to guarantee the future. In so doing, and as becomes even clearer from the opening pages of *The Jewish Community*, Baron was directly opposing both the historical and the political positions of Simon Dubnow.

Baron’s call to view Jewish history as an interacting force with world history came to correct what he called the isolationist approach that seemed to ghettoize

the Jewish historical experience. Major developments would too often be explained as the result of internal causes, the outside world infiltrating the walls primarily through various forms of persecution.

Baron's perspective hardly reduced Jewish history to a passive object subject to stronger world winds, but rather envisioned interactive forces of mutual influences. The Jewish role in the spread of Monotheism was one prominent example of a Jewish contribution; his concessions to Sombart on the Jewish role in the rise of capitalism provided another. Most important, he emphasized repeatedly that communal leaders and institutions were greatly responsible for continued Jewish survival. Indeed, one of the main implications of Baron's critique of the lachrymose conception was that the communities and their leaders throughout the centuries had not been woeful and passive players in determining their own historical course. Rather, the nature and extent of historical interaction was dominated by the outside environment.¹³

Taken together, his aversion to the lachrymose approach and to the isolation of Jewish history implied that Jewish history should incorporate the same modes of interpretation used by other historians. Baron put it this way in his 1939 essay "Emphases in Jewish History": "There is a growing feeling that the historical explanations of the Jewish past must not fundamentally deviate from the general patterns of history which we accept for mankind at large or for any other particular national group."¹⁴

During my own days as a graduate student at the Jewish Theological Seminary, Baron still symbolized for me and my peers the academic integration of Jewish history in university life. It was thus somewhat traumatic for me when during the course of my research I discovered that Baron himself had actually been reluctant to join Columbia's department of history at the time of his appointment. In the oral folklore, the story had been retold for decades that the history department had resisted Baron's affiliation and that Nicholas Butler, Columbia's venerable president, virtually compelled the department to accept Baron. Remarkably, Baron had "Trillingized" his own story, since a different anecdote relates that Butler did compel the literature department to accept Lionel Trilling. In fact, a number of items in Columbia's records and in the Baron archives confirm that it was Baron himself who opposed the affiliation with History. Baron's own preference was apparently for an autonomous program in the European tradition from which he had come. But the records also demonstrate that Baron quickly learned to take advantage of his new settings. In 1947, Rabbi Joseph Baron of Milwaukee (not a relative) requested information that would support a local effort to establish a chair in Jewish studies at the University of Wisconsin. Baron's response provides not only a detailed description of the program that had developed at Columbia, but also a sweeping commentary on the significance of Jewish studies in America. Here are some excerpts from that letter.

I am delighted to hear that a movement is afoot to establish another Jewish chair. . . . My own experience at Columbia University for the last seventeen years has been extremely encouraging. . . . My primary association is with the Graduate Faculty of Political Science where . . . Jewish history is considered a field of primary interest along with various other branches of social science. The courses in this field are fully recognized for credit in all

related fields and students qualifying for a Master's or a Ph.D. degree are treated fully on a par with such students in other fields.

My lecture courses have from the beginning been attended by a large number of graduate students as well as some undergraduates. . . . These students were of all denominations and a variety of interests . . . and considered a course in Jewish history as rounding out their training. . . . Others have attended the course merely out of general cultural interest; still others have specialized in it. . . .

Among the Doctors of Philosophy in this field there are several prominent younger rabbis and ministers who have already made a mark in their profession. Others went into teaching. . . . It may be mentioned that one Jewish dissertation was honored by the Dunning Prize as the "best dissertation" written at Columbia in any field of European history in three years.

Indirectly, too, the existence of such a chair at Columbia has contributed to the diffusion of interest in Jewish subjects among a variety of students. For instance, Columbia and Union Theological Seminary have recently embarked on a joint project . . . in the field of Religion. . . . It was but natural to ask the professor of Jewish history to join that committee. . . . Similarly, . . . [in a] course in the History of Spanish Civilization, . . . sessions were set aside for a discussion of the position of the Jews in medieval Spain. . . . In short, both faculty and students became far more aware of the importance of the Jewish factor in world civilization than they had been before.

If one believes that real, substantial knowledge is going to foster goodwill between the Jews and their neighbors, if one believes that a recognition of the Jewish contribution to civilization is a matter of great scholarly, as well as public, concern and if one, finally, believes in the need of Jewish cultural achievements and cultivation of interest in their own past by the Jewish people itself, then there is probably no better means for achieving all these purposes than the establishment of Jewish studies at various universities.¹⁵

By contrast, contemporary teachers of Jewish studies would surely find less relevance in the opportunities Baron found to explain Judaism and Jewish history to non-Jewish students and faculty, while placing greater significance on the identity-concerns of their Jewish students. This would hardly be the only change in orientation that has emerged over the intervening decades between the forties and the nineties.

Baron bequeathed to Jewish studies in America a valuable legacy. First and foremost, together with Harvard's Wolfson, Baron symbolized the academic legitimization of Jewish studies. The later flourishing of the field in American universities when timing and circumstances allowed was facilitated by the reputation of excellence at the pioneering stage. Perhaps even more remarkable was Baron's position in one of America's great history departments, providing the significant precedent of recognizing that Jews as a people had a history of their own and a history well worth the attention of the academy. Even today that is no mean accomplishment. It is worth noting that several major ivy league institutions refused until recently to appoint Jewish historians to departments of history, rather than to Near East or religion departments, regardless of the expertise of the incumbent of those positions.

Second, Baron established a reputation for making heavy demands of his doctoral students that ensured their academic credibility. Baron demanded not only knowledge of the breadth of Jewish history and of Hebrew, but also the languages of the environment in which the student wished to specialize, as well as the general history of the period of specialization.

Of course, these points are strongly related. In the conception of instruction that developed at Columbia, graduates were to be prepared to integrate into the academic world. While their primary sources would often remain inaccessible to anyone but the specialist, the results of their research would not be sequestered from that of their colleagues. The seeds had been sown for a healthy and profitable intellectual exchange between scholars of Judaica and scholars of different interests, for it emphasized the benefits of sharing a common discipline. Several of Baron's successors at Columbia, among them Yosef Yerushalmi and Gerson Cohen, have been particularly well known for precisely that kind of interaction.

Nowadays, several aspects of this somewhat idyllic picture have been compromised within our field. It is common for Israeli scholars and others to ask how one can specialize in Jewish Studies without being fluent in Hebrew. Other scholars ask in return how dissertations can be written without knowledge of Russian, Polish, or Spanish, depending on the period and community being studied. How universities can within a context of academic rigor appoint to Jewish studies scholars who at times lack even basic familiarity with Hebrew may remain a mystery, but it is no less cryptic that a university whether in Israel or elsewhere would allow a doctoral candidate to complete a thesis, for example, on Eastern European Jewry without competence in Russian or Polish. The response that for many topics Hebrew and Yiddish suffice begs the point. Essentially, an assessment has been made *a priori* that archival and other materials deriving from the surrounding environment are irrelevant. Furthermore, although the scholar is presumably being trained within a defined sphere of expertise, that description is being compromised from the very outset by such linguistic deficiencies. As always, language speaks to broader concerns. And one of the more sensitive issues remains as it was in Baron's day, the question of the proper location for positions in Jewish studies.

Indeed, one of the central elements in Baron's legacy to Jewish Studies has been significantly weakened by recent trends that have placed considerably less value on academic integration, and deemed historical normalization as counter-productive, emphasizing instead the now more accentuated pursuit of ethnic identity. The increased popularity of departments of Jewish Studies in American universities reflects by its very nature a decline in intellectual exchange between Judaica scholars and their colleagues in other fields.

In fact, these trends find further expression in the diminishing value currently attributed to the study of Jewish social history itself. The basic axiom of social history, that Jewish social behavior could be explained in normative modes, led it to adopt the jargon and methods of the broader disciplinary domain. The current reversal toward uniqueness shuns such common denominators.

Several compelling arguments can of course be induced for the other side. It is often claimed that funds can more easily be raised for positions within a separate department. Even more cogent is the claim that there are still universities where host departments either will not approve a position in Judaica or will actively

seek to define the position such as to weaken its Judaic connections. I would not claim that these practical considerations should be swept away, but I would argue that the theoretical problematics involved can not be ignored. There are examples of Judaic studies departments which, while acknowledging the issues involved, have managed to avoid the ghettoizing tendencies that might otherwise arise so easily. Jewish studies in American universities has flourished in the age of enhanced ethnic identity, but it also has had to take into consideration the impact and inherent risks of the academic context in which it has prospered. Nevertheless, the Baronian model still provides us with a fundamental challenge. Baron's legacy serves to remind us that in many ways communal responsibilities can at times be best fulfilled with scholarly achievement.

NOTES

1. This essay is based on my *Salo Wittmayer Baron: Architect of Jewish History* (New York: New York University Press, 1995). Salo Baron, *Ancient and Medieval Jewish History* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1972), pp. 513–14. In response to Baer, Baron wrote that "I am still unable to locate any anti-Semitic forerunners; and, to the best of my knowledge, I was the first to coin the term 'lachrymose conception,' when my scholarly conscience (perhaps also, subconsciously, pride in the Jewish heritage) made me impatient with the eternal self-pity characteristic of Jewish historiography." Baer's review appeared in *Zion* 3(1938): 277–299.
2. Salo Baron, "Newer Emphases in Jewish History," *History and Jewish Historians: Essays and Addresses* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1964), p. 96.
3. Robert Liberles, "Post-Emancipation Historiography and the Jewish Historical Societies of America and England," *Studies in Contemporary Jewry*, vol. 10 (1995): 45–65.
4. Baron discussed the Russian migration movements in *Social and Religious History of the Jews*, 1st ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1937), Vol. II, pp. 264–66, and *The Russian Jew under Tsars and Soviets* (New York: Macmillan, 1964), pp. 84–89; the quotation is from pp. 86–87.
5. On Zionism, see *Social and Religious History of the Jews*, II, pp. 307–310. The description in *The Russian Jew*, pp. 172–181, does not deal with these interpretative questions.
6. *History and Jewish Historians*, p. 100.
7. *History and Jewish Historians*, p. 267.
8. *History and Jewish Historians*, p. 78.
9. *Social and Religious History of the Jews*, I, pp. 3–4.
10. *Social and Religious History of the Jews*, I, pp. 26–31.
11. *Social and Religious History of the Jews*, I, p. 28.
12. *The Jewish Community, its History and Structure to the American Revolution* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1942), Vol. I, 5–8; Vol. III, 3–4.
13. These points are emphasized in "World Dimensions of Jewish History" and "Newer Emphases in Jewish History," *History and Jewish Historians: Essays and Addresses* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1964).
14. See *History and Jewish Historians*, p. 77.
15. Joseph L. Baron Collection, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Letters of May 13 and June 5, 1947.

From All Their Habitations

FROM ALL THEIR HABITATIONS takes its title from Ezekiel 37:23 and features reports of Jewish religious, intellectual, and communal life in various parts of the world.

Judaism and the Jewish Community in the New South Africa

DANA EVAN KAPLAN

SOUTH AFRICAN JEWRY TODAY IS TRYING TO STABILIZE after two decades or more of trauma and uncertainty. Almost two years after the first democratic elections which brought Nelson Mandela to power,¹ the Jewish community is still suffering from a long but damaging emigration pattern.² Violence is one problem, especially in Johannesburg. Car-jacking occurs there frequently and can sometimes be violent. Affirmative action is another threat to white middle-class economic ambitions, and there is a fear of lowered standards of education from pre-primary up through university. These fears are warranted, especially for those taking a long-term view. On the other hand, the transition to majority democratic rule was amazingly peaceful, and the relations between the races are much better than an outsider would possibly expect them to be.

Nevertheless, emotions swing easily from one extreme to the other. Perusing the newspapers, one finds a medical doctor writing that "our academics are fleeing, our standards are crumbling and our reputations are disintegrating. What we destroy now we will never replace,"³ and, in the same vein, a Professor of Law writes that "the criminal justice system is in crisis. It lacks legitimacy and is seen as ineffective."⁴ However, alongside these negative views, many are optimistic. There is a euphoric sense of accomplishment at creating a peaceful new rainbow nation, and there is the hope that the country can become a model for a successful transition from minority to majority rule. The Open Society Foundation's Aryeh Neier summarized the optimistic view on a recent visit: "This is one of the world's bright spots. While much of the world is going downhill fast, South Africa's impact is being felt in the rest of the continent and worldwide. For example in Haiti, where we established a foundation recently, President Aristide has remade himself using Nelson Mandela as a model."⁵

Despite significant emigration in recent years, the Jewish Community in South Africa is still an important one. The Jewish demographer Professor Sergio Della Pergola reported at a Conference on Jewish demography, held at the Kaplan Centre for Jewish Studies and Research at the University of Cape Town in 1994, that South Africa has the ninth largest Jewish community in the world, approximately equal to the Jewish population of Brazil, at about 100,000.⁶ Much of the discussion of South African Jewry at the conference was based on a recent study by Professor Allie A. Dubb.⁷ According to this report the Jewish population of

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South Africa has continued to decrease since the writing of the study. Despite large-scale immigration from Israel, Jewish numbers have continued to decline. If the low affiliation rate of Israelis is considered, the loss is even greater. Over 42 percent of heads of households are aged 50 or older, with no children left in the family home, with Israelis now making up at least 10 percent of the Jewish community, while others suggest as high a figure as 13 percent. Nevertheless, I believe that since the writing of the Dubb study, the population has stabilized. Small numbers of Jews continue to leave, but the vast majority of those who have stuck it out are planning to remain for the foreseeable future. Still, a substantial percentage of those who remain harbor strong ambivalence or negative views and a major crisis could easily prompt a new wave of mass emigration.

The Dubb study also pointed out that the fiscal operating costs of the Jewish communal institutions are very high and recommended that the community be more disciplined with its resources in order to maintain their viability. Mendel Kaplan, chairman of the South African Board of Governors of the World Jewish Agency and Chairman of the World Jewish Congress, shocked the audience at the Conference by stating that the operating costs of the Johannesburg Jewish Community were 200 million Rands per annum (3.6 rands equal one dollar).⁸ Cape Town has recently addressed this concern by announcing a plan to merge the three Jewish Communal bodies into a Western Cape Jewish Federation. Recommended by communal leader Eliot Osrin, this plan was greeted warmly at the 1995 annual meeting of the Western Cape Board of Deputies.⁹

Fully 82 percent of all South Africa's Jews now reside in either Johannesburg or Cape Town. This fact is perhaps the most critical in evaluating the future communal needs of South African Jewry. Most of the small communities—which only 30 or 40 years ago were vibrant centers of Jewish communal life—have ceased to function, and even large cities such as East London, Pretoria, and Port Elizabeth are struggling to keep communal activities going. Cape Town has maintained its numbers better than most other communities because of its relatively safe—as well as beautiful—environment and a substantial internal migration from other parts of South Africa.

The Johannesburg Jewish Community—by far the largest in the country—has seen a strong turn towards strict orthodoxy. The Reform Movement in Johannesburg was hit hard by a divisive synagogue split a few years ago and is only now beginning to recover. One very noticeable recent trend, evident primarily in Johannesburg, has been the growth of a Baal Teshuva movement. Well-financed and organized, a number of ultra-orthodox groups including Ohr Sameach, Aish Hatorah, and the Lubavitch movement, have established branches in the City of Gold. One recent observer may not be overstating the case when he wrote that “unlike the Baal Teshuva or outreach Movement worldwide which has transformed individuals and families, the religious revival in Johannesburg is transforming an entire community. They say that every extended family in Johannesburg can claim at least one newly-*frum* member.”¹⁰

This is connected to a related phenomenon—the growth of the *shtiebl*. While South African Orthodoxy has always been characterized by the large formal synagogues typical of the British Commonwealth, the new trend is towards small very traditionalistic houses of prayer. As Rabbi Norman Bernhard, the senior rabbi of the Oxford Synagogue Centre and Co-President of the Southern African

Rabbinical Association, writes: “How attitudes have changed! *Shtiebl* is no longer a dirty word.” Most of the “many young people who are rediscovering and reclaiming their Jewish heritage find that interest kindled or advanced by one of the *frumer*, learning-oriented groups beyond the pale of the Big Shuls and the religious establishment. The kind of Yidishkayt to which they are attracted is identified more with the *shtiebl*, so that most of the newer Baalei-teshuva are drawn thither rather than to the ‘Big Shuls.’”¹¹

But whereas the Baal Teshuvras in Johannesburg draw a great deal of attention, the non-observant orthodox remain the dominant group. This follows the British model of synagogue affiliation, which spread throughout the British Commonwealth countries. Describing the British non-observant orthodox, Todd Endelman states that “they did not feel any compelling need to alter the public face of Judaism, namely its theology and worship service. Political pressure to make Judaism acceptable to the Christian majority was very weak. English Jews did not feel that Judaism was on trial or that they had to prove their loyalty to the nation by abandoning their ethnic particularism. In addition, well-to-do Jews were reluctant to tamper with established patterns of public observance because of the high status that the ruling class attached to religious tradition in general. The conservative nature of Orthodoxy, however nominal the attachment of the Anglo-Jewish bourgeoisie to it, paralleled the conservative nature of the Church of England while the liberal character of Reform paralleled that of Nonconformity, which did not enjoy the social standing of Anglicanism. Most wealthy English Jews valued religious tradition simply because it was venerable and established.”¹²

This characterization is true for South African Jews, even in the post-apartheid era. As Professor Jocelyn Hellig, perhaps the most sensitive observer of South African Judaism today, writes, “It is noteworthy that the majority of Jews in South Africa can be labeled ‘unobservant orthodox.’ Officially, orthodoxy is based on Torah Judaism, which involves the meticulous observance of Jewish ritual. The majority of Jews who are affiliated with orthodoxy are drawn to tradition, attend synagogue, and observe the major festivals and rites of passage. They feel no discomfort in driving to synagogue on the holy days and choosing to neglect a great many of the ritual observances. Some keep kosher homes, but do not mind eating non-kosher food out of the home. Others may be more or less observant. It is the presence of these Jews in substantial numbers that gives South African Judaism its special character. The flexibility of South African orthodoxy, as it is understood by the average congregant, although it markedly strains the true definition of orthodoxy, may account for the minor impact of reform Judaism in South Africa.”¹³ Hellig continues by noting that this unobservant orthodoxy is tolerated by the orthodox rabbinate as it is “so intrinsic a part of the South African Jewish way of life”—and in the hope that many will one day return to correct religious observance. Hellig reports that the orthodox rabbinate counters the oft-made charge that the only difference between it and reform Judaism is that reform Jews are not “hypocrites,” by saying that, unlike reform Judaism, “orthodox Judaism holds firm to the validity of the *halakhah* in the oral Torah.”¹⁴

As Rabbi Dr. Dennis Isaacs, a dayan of the Johannesburg Beit Din and Rabbi Emeritus of the Cyrildene-Observatory Hebrew Congregation, wrote, “as long as a Jew maintains his tie with the Jewish people and the Torah, though he is not fully observant, he is our brother. The portals of his soul are open to receive inspiration.

There is the hope—showing itself ever more a reality in the growth of the *ba'al teshuvah* movement and its many adherents who are becoming ever more observant—that his children will receive a more intense Jewish education and will observe where he did not. Indeed, it requires an act of courage by the non-observant to attend and belong to an Orthodox synagogue.” The Orthodox “synagogue and community must keep its doors and lines of communication open to the non-observant. Herein lies the only possibility for the non-observant ever to become observant, and for the sinner to be transformed into a saint.”¹⁵ Many of the non-observant orthodox are beginning to feel greater pressure to conform to orthodox standards. This is a worldwide trend but it seems more pronounced in South Africa than in most other countries. I served a congregation in Australia for a total of eight months over a two-year period, and I did not witness anything approaching the religious pressure being applied on Orthodox congregants in South Africa. This is particularly true for Johannesburg Orthodox Jewry. Judging from my experiences here, I expect that they will complain loudly in private but conform to public expectations.

While orthodoxy is becoming more observant, Reform is—despite some serious internal conflicts fought over the past several years—drawing many conversionary couples.¹⁶ Furthermore, there is a growing unaffiliated population who are no longer affiliated with an orthodox shul but have not moved over to the Progressive camp. While still very low by American standards, this group is in many respects even more alienated from the Jewish community than unconnected American Jews, since it is that much harder to be unaffiliated in South Africa. While many Americans may just slide into apathy, a high percentage of unaffiliated South African Jews have chosen not to participate in organized Jewish life.

The Progressive Movement in South Africa was established in 1929 by Jerry Idelson in Johannesburg. The first rabbi to lead the movement was Rabbi Moses Cyrus Weiler, who arrived in Johannesburg in 1933.¹⁷ It never reached more than 20 percent of the total Jewish population, and as a result of the Johannesburg Imanu-Shalom conflict, some sources place the Reform affiliation rate as low as nine percent. Most estimates place it between 11 and 20 percent, with at least 15 percent probably accurate for Cape Town.

The Imanu-Shalom conflict has hurt the Reform movement severely in Johannesburg. It began when Temple Shalom invited Rabbi Ady E. Assabi to officiate at High Holy Days services in 1985 and then offered him their pulpit. When Rabbi Norman Mandel of Temple Emanuel left the country to return to California, Temple Emanuel tried to hire Rabbi Assabi as well. Rabbi Assabi refused to leave Shalom, which he felt was in the middle of a religious transformation, but offered Emanuel the opportunity to join in. The result was Imanu-Shalom Congregation.¹⁸

But in 1991 Imanu-Shalom decided to suspend its membership in the Southern African Union for Progressive Judaism, and then 18 months later it broke completely with the Reform Movement. A small faction, centered around former Emanuel congregants, organized a “Temple Emanuel survival committee” to resplit the two congregations and bring Emanuel back to the Reform Movement. Imanu-Shalom refused this request, and a lawsuit ensued. The judge ordered the two sides to settle out of court, and Imanu-Shalom agreed to return the Emanuel building.¹⁹ This resulted in 1993 in the reincorporation of Temple Emanuel and its return to the Progressive fold.

Rabbi Michael Standfield, formerly the rabbi of Temple Israel in inner city Hillbrow, was appointed the rabbi. Rabbi Standfield was already serving as the chair of the Southern African Association of Progressive Rabbis.²⁰ The congregation—once well over 700 families—began at 90 and has now risen to almost 400.²¹

Rabbi Assabi²² broke with the Reform Movement and is today Rabbi of Congregation Shalom, an independent congregation which claims a degree of affiliation with the conservative Masorati Movement.²³ Assabi has critiqued the Reform Movement of South Africa, saying “the so-called Progressive Movement in this country has become over the years ‘reformodox.’ In its entire existence, it has neither progressed nor has it regressed or moved at all, for that matter.” As a “Progressive Movement we have not dealt in any significant way with the unique South African situation.”²⁴ Shalom has attracted the most dedicated members of Imanu-Shalom, but many have joined Orthodoxy or become disaffiliated, and it appears unlikely that Emanuel and Shalom will ever again approach their earlier numbers.

Many people—both South Africans as well as visitors—comment that South African Reform is similar to American Conservative Judaism. Nevertheless, while South African Reform may use more Hebrew than many American Classical Reform temples, it has a very similar ideology to mainstream American Reform. As Hellig writes:

Observers often gain the mistaken impression that reform Judaism in South Africa is no different from conservative Judaism in America. Conservative Judaism regards the *halakha* as binding but permits greater flexibility with regard to its interpretation than does orthodoxy. South African reform, like reform everywhere else, emphasizes the ongoing nature of revelation, seeing Judaism as dynamic and growing. Judaism, it believes, continues to be adapted by legitimate exponents for its time and circumstances throughout the ages. This process, once passive, has now become reactivated. It views many of the historic developments in Judaism as reforms that were introduced throughout the ages in order to make the religion meaningful for Jews in their particular historical situation. Thus, progressive Judaism sees itself as being as old as Judaism itself.²⁵

The Progressive Movement has a tremendous potential, and there are hopes that a more stable rabbinic leadership is now in place and will lead the movement to fulfill its potential.²⁶

South African Judaism stands at the crossroads. Just as South Africa today is not the same country it was 10 or 20 years ago, so too the Jewish community is not the same community it was a decade or two previously. Many of the brightest and most creative individuals have emigrated to San Diego, London, Sydney, or Perth. While this was derisively called “the Chicken Run,”²⁷ it was in some cases a moral response to the evils of apartheid, as well as the natural desire of many to search for a more secure and peaceful environment. This is especially true for academics, who were able to secure employment in a new country without too much of a problem. Businessmen on the other hand were more likely to remain in the country rather than abandon their business enterprises. But many of the wealthy have indeed emigrated, and so it is difficult to quantify subjective impressions. Nevertheless, most observers would characterize the present South African Jewish

community as poorer and less educated as well as smaller numerically than it was fifteen or twenty years ago.

But a number of these fears have been alleviated by the peaceful political transition—at least to some degree. South African Judaism must now begin to build an organic religious worldview which incorporates the eternal teachings of Judaism into an indigenous approach to social and economic justice for the long-oppressed non-white masses. Jews must present a powerful case for Judaism's relevancy to the new South Africa in order to be taken seriously as social thinkers and activists. While individual South African Jews such as Helen Suzman, Joe Slovo, Ronnie Kasrils, Albie Sachs—the list is long—were leaders of the anti-apartheid struggle, most of what they did was done in their own names. As Christian theologians call for a religious focus on healing the emotional wounds of the people in the country, Judaism too must formulate a theological response to the oppression and liberation which has taken place in this country.²⁸ Such a response can easily be articulated, but it must grow out of the community and not just be expressed by an individual rabbi speaking on his own. The Orthodox Chief Rabbi, Cyril Harris, has made some notable efforts in this direction. Since Harris is perceived as the representative of the Jewish community, his speeches have a semi-authoritative tone. While most Jews have been supportive of his liberal positions on political issues, some have aggressively criticized him.

The apartheid era was a very difficult time for South African Jewry. From the rise of Nazism in 1933, the threat of Afrikaner Nationalism was very real. Afrikaner Nationalists and the Nazis shared common perspectives on a variety of issues such as the racial superiority of certain groups, economic frustrations, political aspiration, and anti-British sentiment.²⁹ While the Afrikaner leadership never entered into an alliance with the Nazis, the National Party was perceived to harbor anti-Jewish and perhaps anti-Semitic views. Therefore, the election of Dr. D. F. Malan and the National Party in 1948 frightened many in the Jewish community. While Malan made substantial efforts to reassure the Jews that they were not threatened, the Jewish community attempted to protect itself and hence avoided raising any opposition to the National Party's racial policies. This fear of anti-Semitism is one of the main reasons offered to explain the perceived acquiescence of South African Jewry to the government at the time.³⁰

Nevertheless, by May 1980, the National Congress of the Jewish Board of Deputies had passed a resolution urging "all concerned [people] and, in particular, members of our community to co-operate in securing the immediate amelioration and ultimate removal of all unjust discriminatory laws and practices based on race, creed, or colour."³¹ As the 1980s proceeded and the expectation that political change might actually occur grew, the community became a bit bolder but in general it still attempted to avoid antagonizing the National Party government.

In the view of one political analyst this approach evaluated "events in the light of their effect on Jews as an interest group. What do political events mean for the Jewish rights and interests and how can Jewish leadership influence events to ensure that the community's interests are protected?" This contrasts with a more principled approach "that Judaism has a specific message and that it is the duty of Jews to propagate it in any situation in which they find themselves."³² According to the latter view, the South African Jewish community's role should have developed a Judaic religious response to the political developments in the light of

its religious teachings. This never happened, although a small number of rabbis attempted to pursue it. Not only were these rabbis discouraged by their congregants, in certain cases they were deported by the government.³³

In 1990, Nelson Mandela was released from prison and a new era in South African politics began. Most Jews reacted as individuals concerned with how the political changes might affect their families, their businesses, and the future of their children. When it appeared that the transition might lead to prolonged violence and instability, many began to make plans to emigrate. Now that the country has made the transition peacefully, and the government is instituting needed social changes while attempting to maintain responsible economic policies,³⁴ many Jews have regained a measure of confidence in the future of the country.

Aside from personal and economic considerations, South African Jews were greatly concerned by the perception that the African National Congress (ANC) had pro-Palestinian policies. While it is true that President Mandela has maintained close ties with revolutionary leaders, such as Castro of Cuba and Gaddafi of Libya whom most of the world would ostracize, this has not had a discernible impact on the overall image of the country. In the case of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), the ANC would certainly have maintained friendly relations with it under almost any set of circumstances but the emerging peace negotiations between the PLO and the Israeli government have completely changed the way that such relations are perceived. Today it is accepted that any western country may have formal relations with the PLO, just as the state of Israel does.

This is of critical importance. South African Jews are among the most Zionist of any Diaspora community. Therefore, a government which strongly supported an organization completely hostile to the Jewish state would have made it very uncomfortable for Jewish citizens, and this discomfort would certainly have prompted many to consider emigration.

Zionism continues to play an important role in the life of the Jews of South Africa. Despite this, there is a widely felt view that today our Zionism is less dynamic. This is logical, since there is greater democracy now and an almost infectious enthusiasm for the promotion of the new South Africa. As local patriotism grows, alternative nationalist identities lose some of their appeal. Also, many of the most committed Zionists have long ago emigrated to Israel. These ex-South African Olim periodically return to their original communities to visit family and take care of business. Numbering as many as 20,000, these Olim provide South African Jews with vivid stories of life in the Jewish state. While this undoubtedly encourages some of those already so inclined to make aliyah, most South African Jews will choose to remain in South Africa rather than move to Israel.³⁵

South Africa has launched an aggressive drive to undo some of the worst by-products of the apartheid system. Both governmental and non-governmental organizations are absorbed in a multi-billion rand project called the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP), and President Mandela recently declared that millions of impoverished South Africans have already benefited from the RDP. More than 28,000 people have been employed, four million have been given access to potable water, and 614 municipal service upgrading projects have already begun. In addition, children, pregnant women, and nursing mothers now receive free health care, and three and a half million children are being fed every

day. Low-income housing projects and other infrastructural developments are being built all over the country.³⁶

The RDP is a ray of hope for the millions of South Africans who live in abject poverty. According to shocking statistics revealed by Minister without Portfolio, Jay Naidoo, more than half of the country's 38 million citizens live in poverty, and South Africa is among those countries with the highest income inequality in the world. As Minister Naidoo, who is in charge of the RDP, states: "The apartheid era has left a legacy of poverty and inequality in South Africa. In spite of the wealth of the country a large share of the population has not been able to benefit from the country's resources."³⁷ In a recently released report entitled "Key Indicators of Poverty in South Africa," it was revealed that in terms of income, the lowest 40 percent of households—equivalent to 53 percent of the population—accounted for less than ten percent of total consumption. The top ten percent of households in terms of income—representing only 5.8 percent of the population—accounted for over 40 percent of consumption. Sixty-one percent of South African children live below the breadline.³⁸

In response to the situation, Orthodox Chief Rabbi Harris has launched Tikkun, a social welfare project dubbed "The Jewish RDP," and Jewish communal bodies have all vigorously supported the RDP initiatives. Furthermore, many individual Jews are playing key roles in the implementation of the social welfare programs. However, there is a lack of any systematic Jewish thinking on the religious significance of the amazing transformation now taking place in South Africa. As a Christian thinker, Archbishop Desmond Tutu is of course known throughout the world for his religious response to the apartheid evil, and Jews in South Africa admire him for his achievement. My congregation recently held a Shabbat Peace Service with interfaith participation by the Most Reverend Tutu, as well as the Reverend William D. Bantam, the Mayor of Cape Town. The Archbishop spoke eloquently and with great humor, remarking that if he and his fellow Christians have adopted the biblical obligation to seek out justice, they had learned this concept from the Jews. Therefore, the Jews were at "fault" if Christians took this message seriously and applied it to the struggle against apartheid.³⁹

It is important that the Jewish community of South Africa nurture and develop religious intellectuals who can present an integrated interpretation of Judaism in the South African context. The political and social realities of this country are unique and these realities allow for a Jewish theological response which can be significant not only for South African thought but for theological and philosophical discourse world-wide.

The universities can be a major source for such intellectual discourse, in particular the Kaplan Centre for Jewish Studies and Research at the University of Cape Town. The Kaplan Centre, which forms part of the department of Hebrew and Jewish Studies though it is an independent research unit, seeks to promote and stimulate Judaic Studies with a special focus on the South African Jewish community. The Centre is multi-disciplinary in scope and encourages the participation of scholars from South Africa and abroad. It is the only institute of its type in South Africa. The director of the Kaplan Centre, Professor Milton Shain, has recently characterized Jewish Studies in South Africa by noting that, "In South Africa at present one notices two intellectual thrusts: on the one hand an Afrocentric push and a call for curricular 'relevance'; on the other, a celebration of diversity and respect for pluralism." Jewish studies "has a long pedigree at a number of South

African universities—a chair of Hebrew was established at the University of Cape Town in 1896.” But given the current situation and the “local context Jewish scholarship needs to relate to both.” In the new South Africa “relevance” has become a watchword; and “Jewish Studies must contribute to other fields and its findings integrated into other disciplines.” These are among the objectives of the Kaplan Centre. Here “visiting scholars are placed in appropriate departments to share expertise with as wide a sector of the academic and student community as possible.”⁴⁰ Many of the other major universities in the country have departments of Jewish and Hebrew Studies. In addition, a significant number of professors and intellectuals in other fields are taking active roles in the development of new conceptual frameworks for the emerging society, and some of these men and women are active in the Jewish community as well. Some of these thinkers have already made significant contributions to defining the relationship between their chosen fields of research and Judaism and the Jewish community.

Now that Jews are free to present their case for prophetic Judaism without an apartheid government’s interference, it is critical that a sophisticated theological argument be made. Only if Judaism can be presented as a religion with a strong theme of social justice can Jews retain their prominent role in society as critics and commentators. It is gratifying to see a number of secular South African newspapers and magazines printing stories on Judaism and then devoting a great deal of space to the resulting debate. But the Jewish Press, unfortunately, is controlled by the “establishment,” and rarely if ever publishes opposing opinions or controversial articles.⁴¹ But debate, if only a start, is essential. We hope that in the coming years South African Judaism will blossom and serve a community poised to execute the social dictates of our religion better than almost any other community in the world.

NOTES

1. See Mandela’s excellent autobiography, *Long Walk to Freedom* (London: Little, Brown and Company, 1994). I would like to thank Ms. Caryn Kaimowitz for presenting me with a copy of this volume, and Jane Parry and Lindi Giger for technical assistance on this article.
2. Professor Milton Shain and Dr. Richard Mendelsohn, both of the University of Cape Town, are currently researching what will become the authoritative monograph on the history of the Jews in South Africa. Until that work is completed, there are a number of excellent studies of individual communities and specific aspects of South African Jewish history. See, for example, Mendel Kaplan and Marion Robertson (eds.), *Founders and Followers: Johannesburg Jewry 1887-1915* (Vlaeberg: Vlaeberg Publishers, 1991); and Milton Shain, *Jewry and Cape Society* (Cape Town: Historical Publication Society, 1983).
3. Dr. John Roos, “Health: The Honorable Minister Must Do Her Sums,” *The Argus* (Thursday, 12 October, 1995): 23.
4. Dr. Jeremy Sarkin, and Susi Cowen, “Attorneys-General Must Be Accountable,” *The Mail and Guardian*, October 13 to 19, 1995: 25.
5. Colin Douglas, “A Bright Spot of the World,” *The Argus* (Thursday, 12 October, 1995): 17.
6. Sergio Della Pergola, “Where Are We Going? Demographic Trends in World Jewish Population,” *Jewish Affairs*, Vol. 50, #3 (Spring 1995): 47.
7. Allie A. Dubb, *The Jewish Population of South Africa: The 1991 Sociodemographic Survey* (Cape Town: The Kaplan Centre for Jewish Studies and Research, 1994). Many local observers have questioned the accuracy of the final data.
8. “Funding of Community Requires More Discipline,” *The South African Jewish Times*, Friday, 7

October, 1994: 4.

9. "Eliot Amazes - With his New RDP Plan for the Cape Jewish Community," *Cape Jewish Chronicle*, Vol. 12, #8 (September 1995): 1. Osrin's plan is to merge the Jewish Board of Deputies, the Western Province Zionist Council, and the Israel United Appeal-United Common Fund-Welfare (IUA-UCF-Welfare), each of which currently is a separate organization.

10. Rabbi Ralph Genende, "South African Jewry Undergoing a Religious Transformation," *The South African Jewish Times*, Rosh Hashanah Annual: 62.

11. Rabbi N. M. Bernhardt, 5756/1995. "The Shtetlisation of the Community: Good or Bad? A South African Perspective," *Jewish Affairs*, Vol. 50, #3 (Spring 1995): 77.

12. Todd M. Endelman, "The Englishness of Jewish Modernity in England," in *Toward Modernity: The European Jewish Model*, edited by Jacob Katz (New Brunswick, New Jersey and Oxford, England: Transaction Books, 1987), p. 235.

13. Jocelyn Hellig, "The Jewish Community in South Africa," in *Living Faiths in South Africa*, edited by Martin Prozesky and John de Gruchy (Cape Town and Johannesburg: David Philip, 1995), p. 169. Also see Hellig's "South African Judaism: An Expression of Conservative traditionalism," *Judaism*, 35, 2 (1986): 233-242.

14. Hellig, "Jewish Community in South Africa," p. 169.

15. Dennis Isaacs, "The Non-Observant Orthodox," *Jewish Affairs*, Vol. 50, #3 (Spring 1995): 68.

16. Dana Evan Kaplan, "Your People, My People: Conversion to Judaism and Jews by Choice," *Jewish Affairs*, Vol. 50, #3 (Spring 1995): 87-89.

17. Michael A. Meyer, *Response to Modernity: A History of the Reform Movement in Judaism* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), pp. 341-342. See also David Sherman, "Reform Judaism in South Africa: Its Origins, Growth and Principles," *Jewish Affairs*, Vol. 48, #1 (Autumn 1992): 27-32. A great deal of material exists in the Temple Israel archives in Hillbrow, Johannesburg, and the South African Union for Progressive Judaism Archives in Temple Emanuel, Houghton, Johannesburg. I thank Ms. Reeve Forman and Mrs. Carol Standfield for making these archives accessible to me.

18. Conversation with Rabbi Assabi, Congregation Shalom, Johannesburg, Summer, 1995.

19. Conversation with Mrs. Marlene Bethlehem, National Chairperson, South African Jewish Board of Deputies, 7 November, 1995. Mrs. Bethlehem is both the first woman and first non-orthodox affiliated Jew to be elected to this position. She is a third generation Reform Jew now affiliated with the Shalom congregation.

20. After Rabbi Standfield completed his term of office, Rabbi Hillel Avidan of Bet David of Sandton assumed the chair of this organization.

21. Conversation with Rabbi Michael Standfield, 6 November, 1995.

22. Assabi has recently published his ideas on theology and has tried to explain what makes his theology unique. See Ady E. Assabi, "Catharsis and Rebirth: The Judaism of the Future," *Jewish Affairs*, Vol. 50, #3 (Spring 1995): 81-86.

23. Rabbi Nissim Wernick, a conservative ordained Rabbi who once served the Reform congregation in Pretoria, broke away from the Reform Movement to establish a very small conservative congregation, Ohev Shalom, in 1991. Rabbi Ben Isaacson, formerly an orthodox rabbi, served the Har El congregation in Houghton which also was similar to Conservative Judaism. Isaacson has since returned to orthodoxy.

24. Rabbi A. E. Assabi, *The Path of Imanu-Shalom: The Renewal of the Old and the Sanctification of the New*, an edited version of a lecture delivered on the second day of Rosh Hashanah 5752 (Johannesburg: Imanu-Shalom, 5752), pp. 9-10.

25. Jocelyn Hellig, "Jewish Community in South Africa," p. 167.

26. Dana Evan Kaplan, "Yes, a Modern Renaissance of Judaism Is Needed for It to be Relevant for the New South Africa," *The Sunday Independent*, 17 September, 1995: 19; "Progressive Judaism in the New South Africa," a paper presented at the Kaplan Centre for Jewish Studies and Research, University of Cape Town, Symposium on "The Rabbinate and the New South Africa," Sunday 6

- November, 1994; "Progressive Judaism and the New South Africa," *Jewish Affairs*, Vol. 50, #4 (Summer 1995).
27. Just before the 1994 elections one South African magazine wrote that "First it was called the Chicken Run, then the Brain Drain, then Asset Relocation. Now those who are getting out of the country are simply known as Nick-of-Timers" (*Style Magazine*, March 1994).
28. M. Ramphela, "Changing South Africa: A Plea for a Focus on Healing," *South African Outlook*, Vol. 122, #1456 (October 1992): 131-134.
29. Stephen Cohen, "Historical Background," in *South African Jewry: A Contemporary Survey*, edited by Marcus Arkin (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1984), p. 8.
30. This has been one of the most extensively researched areas of South African Jewish history. For a historical survey, see the masterful book by Milton Shain, *The Roots of Anti-Semitism in South Africa* (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 1994). For a contemporary account, see Jocelyn Hellig, "Anti-Semitism in South Africa Today," *Jewish Affairs* (March-April 1989): 37-39.
31. Harry Schwarz, "Political Attitudes and Interactions," in *South African Jewry: A Contemporary Survey*, edited by Marcus Arkin (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1984), p. 136.
32. Steven Friedman, "South Africa in Transition: Implications for Jewry," *Jewish Affairs* (March-April 1991): 12.
33. Solly Kessler, "The South African Rabbinate in the Apartheid Era," *Jewish Affairs* (Autumn 1995): 31-35, presented at a symposium on the Rabbinate in the New South Africa, the Kaplan Centre for Jewish Studies and Research, University of Cape Town, 7 November 1994.
34. Madeleine Wackernagel, "Government Keeps a Tight Rein on Fiscal Policy," *The Mail and Guardian*, 15-21 March 1996: 133. The report states "economic growth last year was the best on record since 1988."
35. On South African Zionism, see Marcus Arkin, "The Zionist Dimension," in *South African Jewry: A Contemporary Survey*, edited by Marcus Arkin (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1984), pp. 79-93; Marcus Arkin, "Reevaluating South African Zionism," *Jewish Affairs* (December 1991): 23-27; and for a historical review, Gideon Shimoni, *Jews and Zionism: The South African Experience 1910-1967* (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1980).
36. Joseph Aranes, "RDP Firmly on Track," *The Argus* (21 December 1995): 6.
37. "Most South Africans in Poverty - Report," *The Argus* (24 January 1996): 14.
38. Jay Naidoo, "Bridging Chasm to Create One South Africa," *The Sunday Times*, 11 (February 1996): 24.
39. Dana Evan Kaplan, "The Visit of Archbishop Tutu," *Temple Israel Newsletter*, Vol. 53, #2 (March-April 1996): 4-5.
40. Milton Shain, "South Africa," in *Teaching Jewish Civilization: A Global Approach to Higher Education*, edited by Moshe Davis (New York: New York University Press, 1995), p. 71.
41. In particular the *Sunday Independent* and *The Weekly Mail and Guardian*. Solly Kessler, "No News Is Bad News," *The Cape Jewish Chronicle* (March 1996): 2. Kessler writes that "*The Cape Jewish Chronicle* in which this piece appears does not purport to be a newspaper, which is a great pity . . . because of its structure as a periodical sponsored by certain communal organizations which pay for the pages they use . . . it eschews the really newsworthy stories, controversy and debate."

Hitler's Willing Executioners

Hitler's Willing Executioners. By DANIEL JONAH GOLDHAGEN. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1996.

Reviewed by SAMUEL W. KAPLAN

IT ISN'T POSSIBLE TO UNDERSTAND THE FUROR that immediately enveloped *Hitler's Willing Executioners*,¹ Daniel Jonah Goldhagen's indictment of German anti-Semitism during the Nazi period, without remembering that for more than thirty-five years many of the most capable scholars and writers of the Holocaust have emphasized the power of other factors to propel Germans to the genocidal assault on European Jews. From Raul Hilberg's *The Destruction of the European Jews*² through as recent a book as Christopher Browning's *Ordinary Men*,³ one analyst after another has argued that the German perpetrators did not have to hate Jews in order to participate in the slaughter. Ordinary Germans could do it because they were orderly, unemotional bureaucrats who merely carried out their part of an abstract division of labor; or because they were accustomed to obeying orders in an unquestioning way; or because they were terrified of retaliation; or because they wanted to advance their careers; or because they came under the moral coercion of their comrades in the killing units. No book has contributed more to this perception than Hannah Arendt's *Eichmann in Jerusalem*,⁴ which repeatedly emphasizes Eichmann's apparently passionless devotion to organizing the transport of Jews to the extermination camps.⁵ Not so unwittingly, her memorable oxymoron, "the banality of evil," has passed into ordinary language as a standard typification of the motivations of Eichmann and many other Germans.⁶ Now its widespread use defines

the polemical context of Goldhagen's fervent re-analysis of the attitudes and emotions of the Germans who were the torturers and murderers of the Final Solution.

Goldhagen repudiates this entire tradition of explanation. His assault is strident, repetitious, one-sided, and, in its all-important social arithmetic, loose enough to be reckless, but at battle's end many of the principal efforts of the last fifty years to explain German participation in the Holocaust look severely damaged, some of them fatally. Point by point, Goldhagen makes a robust case for believing that the sufficient motivational cause of individual participation in the execution of the Holocaust was the widespread and intense ideology of "eliminationist antisemitism."⁷ He has no patience for the claims based on the Milgram experiments, which he dismisses in a brief paragraph,⁸ and he does not bother to mention the Zimbardo prison-guard experiments, both of them central to many analyses of the Holocaust. It is enough to know, he says, that a hundred years of public and private discourse in Germany had created a commonsensical, taken-for-granted understanding that Jews were a race whose flaws were biological and therefore incorrigible, so that by the time the Nazis took control of the state ordinary Germans by the millions believed that the only way to deal with the Jews was to eliminate them, perhaps merely by expelling them across the border, but most conclusively by exterminating them, as one kills dangerous vermin. It was the fear and hatred of Jews, and nothing else, that explains why large numbers of ordinary Germans, in

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Goldhagen's opinion most of them, were willing to carry out the intimate work of genocidal slaughter.⁹

If rabid anti-Semitism planted far and wide in the German people was "the mainspring of the Holocaust,"¹⁰ Goldhagen does not imagine that these motivations could have by themselves produced genocide,¹¹ though some of his critics appear not to have noticed how careful he is on this point.¹² The anti-Semitism of the German people can only explain why so many of them were willing to take part in terrifying and killing so many helpless Jews. It does not explain why the government had enough will and power to conquer foreign lands and organize the mechanisms of genocide. Still, Goldhagen is sure that without the popular hatred of Jews the German program of annihilation would have turned out differently. Presumably it would have proceeded without quite so much face-to-face, supernumerary terror. Perhaps it would have remained only a hallucinatory dream of the Nazi leadership. In any case, it is an indictment which makes virtually the whole of the German people complicitous.

From the beginning, Goldhagen anticipates the trouble this assault on German culture and behavior, not to mention a pantheon of scholars, will bring him. The epigraph of his book quotes *Democracy in America*: "No man can struggle with advantage against the spirit of his age and country, and however powerful a man may be, it is hard for him to make his contemporaries share feelings and ideas which run counter to the general run of their hopes and desires." The epigraph, full of anticipatory solace for the prejudiced judgments he expects from his peers, stands alone on its page, a slightly self-pitying yet defiant warning of the storm ahead, an announcement he is ready to do battle. Goldhagen must be

the least surprised person in the country about the reaction to his book.

Nonetheless, his main argument is bound to incite doubt for reasons other than the passing prejudices of the age. Even readers gratified to be told that virtually all ordinary Germans participated in or supported the Final Solution might object to the methods Goldhagen uses to reach his numerical estimates and then vaults beyond them to increasingly exaggerated claims. It is one thing to say that "tens of thousands" voluntarily and even gladly carried out a program of anti-Semitic terror and murder, but quite another to assert that "the vast majority" of Germans were ready to destroy the Jewish people. It is yet a further leap to conclude that "an enormous number of ordinary, representative Germans became—and most of their fellow Germans were fit to be—Hitler's willing executioners."¹³

These larger claims require a kind of research which would have been nearly impossible during the Nazi era, even if the Nazis themselves had tried to carry it out, and it is absolutely beyond the powers of human calculation fifty or sixty years later. Retrospectively Goldhagen is able to show that many ordinary Germans took direct part in the massacres, but his social mathematics never comes close to establishing his most sweeping numerical claims. Instead, he relies on an analysis of German culture, seeking to demonstrate that eliminationist anti-Semitism was so dominant—"regnant" is a favorite word of his—that virtually all Germans must have developed Nazified minds. He has no trouble showing that eliminationist anti-Semitism extended far beyond the relatively small circle of the crazed anti-Semites who joined the Nazi Party in the 1920s or the zealot *übermenschen* of the SS. It was, Goldhagen argues, a broad current of racism in demotic German culture. It entered the

consciences of ordinary Germans of every kind. It was embraced by men and women who had no sympathy for the Nazis, by doctors, judges, scientists, professors, pastors, and bishops, by merchants, middle-aged policemen, housewives, truck drivers, factory workers, and university students. These ordinary Germans believed so strongly that Jews were subhuman, alien, utterly dangerous agents that when the regime beckoned, many tens of thousands and perhaps millions of Germans were willing and even pleased to terrify, isolate, dispossess, degrade, brutalize, and murder Jews all over Europe.

This claim about the domination of anti-Semitism in forming the beliefs of ordinary Germans, so crucial to Goldhagen's analytical strategy because of the weakness of the evidence about the number of actual and would-be perpetrators, is itself significantly flawed. In so far as it is intended as a critique of the scholars who have emphasized non-ideological factors, it ignores the substantial weight almost all of them have given to the influence of German anti-Semitism. Hilberg, Arendt, Browning, and many others were hardly blind to the anti-Semitic bases of the Holocaust.¹⁴ Browning's explanatory chapter, for instance, gives more space to the influence of anti-Semitism than it does to the influence of group pressures.¹⁵ Even Zygmunt Bauman, whose *Modernity and the Holocaust*¹⁶ is an unusually distraught anxiety attack about the perils of bureaucracy, provides a perceptive chapter on the sources and power of anti-Semitism in German culture.

But Goldhagen's cultural analysis is flawed for an empirical reason too. He does not acknowledge that during the Nazi era there was considerable resistance to at least some of the regime's anti-Semitic policies. While he is successful in arguing that vicious anti-Semitism af-

fected a large part of the population in Nazi Germany, he pays almost no attention to the considerable evidence that many Germans disapproved of and resisted the early and relatively mild attacks on the Jews. Other scholars, notably Sarah Gordon and Ian Kershaw, have shown in their more balanced books that the government had to proceed carefully with much of its anti-Semitic program.¹⁷ Hitler already had found it valuable in his election campaigns to avoid discussing the Jews, presumably because he wanted to improve his electoral showing. Too many Germans had been influenced by the universalistic values of modernity or by the Christian injunction to love one's neighbor for the Nazis to win on a platform of virulent anti-Semitism or, once they took power, to assault the Jews freely. Though relatively few Germans objected to the laws that quickly made the Jews into civil pariahs and impelled about a half-million of them to emigrate, the more extreme attacks produced such hostile reactions that the government frequently retreated. It is easy enough and dramatic to show the flames and broken glass of *Kristallnacht*,¹⁸ but much harder to find pictures of the many Germans who were so outraged by the violence that Hitler had to order his chief lieutenants to back off. For Goldhagen, successful protests against Nazi anti-Semitism show only that it was possible to oppose the regime's policies safely, but not that they also indicate that these protests must have arisen from something other than eliminationist ardor. No one would suggest that the Germany clergy was a bulwark of opposition to anti-Semitism, but it is like Goldhagen that he ignores most of the limited number of known cases of pastoral opposition and treats each of his few examples as a tainted exception smacking of some degree of anti-Semitism or failing to be plainspoken enough.¹⁹ It is as though his

account of the regime's sometime tolerance for dissent has led him to forget that Germans had good reason to fear retaliation.

Despite these failings, Goldhagen's portrait of the apparatus and conduct of genocide is bound to undermine anyone's impression that the Holocaust was the work of a relatively small circle of demonic Nazis who manipulated a reluctant populace into mass murder. The machinery of expropriation, humiliation, expulsion, torture, and mass murder was far too extensive to depend on the work of a small number of Germans guarding the *kapos* of the gas chambers. In addition to the many thousands of specially trained murderers of the *Einsatzgruppen* and the Germans who ran the extermination centers, much larger numbers oversaw the hundreds, if not thousands, of labor camps which were as lethal for Jews as the extermination camps,²⁰ and at least fifteen to twenty thousand ordinary Germans served with the Order Police in Poland, rounding up and shooting tens of thousands of Jews and deporting large numbers of other Jews to the death camps.²¹

Furthermore, the work of the Final Solution was too patently brutal, Goldhagen insists, to have been carried out by men and women who were so morally inert that they felt they were only carrying out orders. Most of the Germans who staffed these organizations must have been imbued with significant anti-Semitic feelings. Little else could explain why the presence of Jews routinely evoked the inventive, often amused cruelty that has become one of the most repulsive hallmarks of the Holocaust.²² The numbing effects of bureaucratization, the pressures of comradesly solidarity or careerist ambition, the fear of reprisal, or a deep German belief in obedience hardly account for the smiles visible on the photographed

faces of German soldiers watching a comrade kick a lone Jewish man lying in a road,²³ the crowds gathered to observe Jews forced to scrub the cobblestones of Vienna with small brushes dipped in a mixture of water and acid, the decision to smash a Jewish child's head against a stone wall while the mother watched, or the demand that a work-camp prisoner wracked by diarrhea eat his own excrement.²⁴ Neither does it explain why the Germans who ran the labor camps systematically forced Jews to do ostentatiously useless work, almost always at a physically dangerous speed. Goldhagen argues persuasively that the German penchant for imposing this regimen, both degrading and lethal, arose from the stereotype that Jews did not, would not, and could not do useful work. Like many other German devices, it was an exercise in murderous irony, akin to the way that the Germans used traditional Jewish rituals and symbols to remind the Jews in ghettos and the death camps how powerless they were and how hopelessly removed from ordinary social life.²⁵

Not much evidence supports the idea that this cruelty was the result of either obedience or compulsive sadism. Himmler always emphasized the importance of systematic, disciplined behavior, as the leaders of bureaucracies are wont to do, and the SS made an effort to weed out men with uncontrollably sadistic personalities. Many of the cruelest torturers were men and women who were quite ordinary people, often pleasant and affectionate in their private lives. In labor camps and on the end-of-the-war death marches, however, they showed themselves able to discriminate between Jews and non-Jews and to treat the Jews much worse, with the result that the Jews they ruled died at a much faster rate than, say, German political prisoners, Poles, or Russian prisoners-of-war.²⁶ Goldhagen is surely right to maintain

that only a conscious, voluntary, and enthusiastic anti-Semitism explains such differential patterns of cruelty and death.

He is also probably right to say that a belief in eliminationist anti-Semitism must account for the reluctance of the men of the Order Police to say after the war that it was wrong to kill the Jews. Reading the protocols of interrogations of many men who had witnessed and taken part in the massacre of tens of thousands of Jews and the deportation of many tens of thousands more, Goldhagen did not find one who denounced the killing. These were men who were not members of the SS, who were usually not members of the Nazi Party, who were adults with families, who had not been educated during the Nazi era, and who had a significant motive to tell their questioners that they had moral misgivings about what their comrades had done, if not they themselves. Looking back at their service in Poland, however, they complained only that the operations were so gory they felt sickened or that some of their comrades were too openly bloodthirsty or that an officer brought along his pregnant wife to witness a roundup, implying it would have been all right if she had not been pregnant. Goldhagen concludes that they must have felt, even after the war, that killing Jews had been a reasonable way to rid not just Germany but the world as well of an immutably dangerous alien force.

The sweep and energy of these arguments, ending with the percussive conclusion that virtually all of the Reich's sixty million people were willing to brutalize and murder Jews under the protective hood of the state, almost inevitably has produced complaints that Goldhagen's book indicts a presumably unchanging German national character.²⁷ Goldhagen has replied plausibly enough in various interviews²⁸ that he has not written about national character, an idea which fell into disfavor in the social

sciences three decades ago, but only about German culture of a particular time and place. That culture, he adds, has changed dramatically since World War Two. He says the same thing in his book.²⁹ But his disclaimer there occurs in a brief, remote footnote and the text itself proposes, untestably, that anti-Semitism is a constant and that only its "expression" varies.³⁰ This lax idea leads all too easily toward the implication that eliminationist anti-Semitism remains a part of contemporary German culture, hidden beneath temporary guilt and denial and awaiting a new confluence of forces to reappear with its old savagery. Here, as elsewhere, Goldhagen has made his argument needlessly vulnerable to criticism of its logic.

But there is another, perhaps more potent source of resistance to Goldhagen's claims about Germany and to his sporadic implication that German anti-Semitism is only sleeping. It runs deeper than the desire to avoid embarrassing a nation which has become a political and economic ally. It runs deeper than the frequently renewed discovery that other societies are capable of equal or greater genocidal violence.

By the end of the nineteenth century, Germany had become one of the most sophisticated nations on earth. In science, the arts, philosophy, and technology it was prodigiously creative. Berlin was one of the premier cultural capitals of the west. It was Germany that created the modern research university. In Germany Jews had full civil rights and no German government tried to abridge them until the Nazis took power. Jews could work in German universities at a time when many American universities would not hire them and had quotas for Jewish students.

Then, abruptly, Germany embarked on its demonic thousand-year voyage and demonstrated that neither the most

illustrious cultural creativity nor the institutions of modern society can be counted on to defend the humane values and practices within the Judaeo-Christian, democratic, and egalitarian traditions. World War One had already shocked the west with its own kinds of massive slaughter. Along with the rest of the Second World War, the Holocaust rent, perhaps for centuries, what remained of the west's self-satisfaction and turned the once-hegemonic idea of progress into a bitter irony. Jewish complacency, which made the work of the Holocaust easier, vanished, but no else could feel safe either. But if that is the main lesson of the descent of Germany into genocide, it is a conclusion certain to "run counter to the general run of human hopes and desires." More than any other knowledge, it throws into doubt every project of modernity, its continual reproduction and extension included.³¹

It is better, then, not to make too much of German culpability. It is more comforting to imagine that the villains were a few madmen who just barely acquired state power or that the Holocaust happened because the First World War, the Versailles Treaty, the failings of Weimar, and the world-wide depression fell into an evil conjunction that transformed the Germans from exemplars of modernity into the avatars of an ancient bestiality. It is more tolerable to displace one's anger and fear from modern Germany to a peasant society that was not yet fully launched on the course of modernization and to say, as many Jews still say, "The Poles were worse." The Poles, after all, are conveniently distant and strange while the Germans are all too much like everyone else in the west.³²

Goldhagen's analysis provides no reassurance for these interpretations. It leaves little doubt that the massacre of the European Jews was the deliberate work of a great many ordinary Germans,

even if it does not prove its assertion that it was the work of the Germans as a whole. When readers encounter Hilberg or Arendt or Bauman or Browning, they will now find it much harder to think that anyone could have done it because the modern world is so bureaucratic³³ or because most humans are weak when they are members of small, intense groups. Large numbers of ordinary people in a particular nation joined in the slaughter because they believed that Jews deserved to be punished and exterminated. When public television commemorates Holocaust Remembrance Week by showing a three-hour documentary whose message is that the Poles were anti-Semitic and remain insufficiently repentant,³⁴ Goldhagen's study, careless and excessive as it is, serves as a valuable warning that it is a form of displacement and confusion in the study of the Holocaust to avoid the centrality of German anti-Semitism. It was the Germans who did it, in large numbers and because they hated Jews. It is neither an error nor a sin to write a book saying so.

NOTES

1. Peter Kenez on the west coast and Robin Leidner on the east have saved me from many errors, though not enough.
2. Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1961.
3. New York: Harper Collins Books, 1992.
4. Rev. and enlarged edition, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1965.
5. A more compelling, less tendentious account of the banality of evil is Gitta Sereny's *Into That Darkness* (New York: Vintage, 1983 [1974]), a detailed portrait of Franz Stangl, the commandant of Sobibor and Treblinka, that makes him, at least, seem rather more like a morally dulled careerist than a genocidally eager killer.
6. Arendt knew what a catchy phrase it was. Her book is subtitled *A Report on the Banality of Evil*.
7. Goldhagen uses this spelling throughout. Dictionaries prefer the hyphen and the capital S. The Goldhagen version tends to naturalize the

term—to imply that it is so common it does not have to be treated as a special compound. Goldhagen's spelling subtly encompasses the book's central thesis that intense German anti-Semitism was much more widespread than most postwar analysts have allowed.

8. Goldhagen, p. 383.

9. Goldhagen, p. 164, defines a perpetrator as "anyone who knowingly contributed in some intimate way to the mass slaughter of the Jews, generally anyone who worked in an institution of genocidal killing." See p. 11 for a similar but less defined use of the word "intimate."

10. Goldhagen, p. 452. This ambiguous phrase, rather typical of Goldhagen's excited prose, unnecessarily implies that general German culture was the cause of the government's policy of genocide. Goldhagen understands that other people—the French, say, or the Lithuanians—might have been as anti-Semitic as the Germans. Since, however, he is not arguing that the Holocaust could have happened only in the most anti-Semitic nation, comparative data about the relative degree of demotic anti-Semitism is irrelevant to understanding why the Nazi government elected to pursue the apocalyptic elimination of the Jews. Governments are not simple extensions of the popular will, even in popular dictatorships.

11. Goldhagen spells out his selective emphasis with care in chapter 16, esp. p. 416. "With regard to the *motivational* cause of the Holocaust, for the vast majority of perpetrators, a monocausal explanation does suffice." The italics are Goldhagen's.

12. For instance, Franklin Foer's review in *In These Times*, April 15, 1996, pp. 43–44 at p. 44.

13. Goldhagen, p. 454. See also p. 456: "Because the perpetrators of the Holocaust were Germany's representative citizens, this book is about Germany during the Nazi period and before, its people and its culture." The use of the term "representative citizens" is a frequent trope in the volume, but it merely asserts the conclusion without in any way showing that anti-Semitic Germans were actually representative of the whole population.

14. On the other hand, these authors bear some responsibility for the propensity of readers to overlook their emphasis on anti-Semitism. In her eagerness to dispatch Eichmann as a mindless, mediocre bureaucrat, Arendt, for instance, neglected to mention his remark, reported by Hilberg, p. 634, that he would jump laughing into his grave knowing that he had killed five million Jews. See also the last paragraph of

Ordinary Men, p. 189, which seems to ignore anti-Semitism altogether although Browning has just spent nearly ten pages stressing its significance.

15. Browning, pp. 159–189.

16. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989.

17. Sarah Gordon, *Hitler, Germans, and the "Jewish Question"* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), esp. chapter 6, and Ian Kershaw, *The "Hitler Myth"* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989 [1987]). Goldhagen does not refer to Gordon's book and though he does draw from Kershaw's he ignores its central arguments.

18. Goldhagen, p. 99, reproduces a photograph of a burning synagogue in Frankfurt during *Kristallnacht*.

19. See, for example, Goldhagen, pp. 431–432. Gordon, chapter 8, by no means holds that many German clergy opposed the government's anti-Semitism and she acknowledges that such resistance occurred almost entirely among obscure pastors, but she cites a number of cases that Goldhagen does not mention.

20. Goldhagen, pp. 170–171. Goldhagen does not estimate the number of Germans who operated the labor camps where Jews were imprisoned and killed, but it was many hundreds of camps, presumably each of them with a significant complement of managers, supervisors, and guards.

21. Goldhagen, p. 274. The long table, pp. 271–273, reveals how active the Order Police were in the Holocaust. Goldhagen's statistics show that Browning's findings in *Ordinary Germans* for Police Battalion 101 apply to many other units.

22. Goldhagen, pp. 307–308.

23. Reproduced in Martin Gilbert, *The Holocaust* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1985) between pp. 328 and 329. Goldhagen does not refer to the photo or to Gilbert's book. See also the faces of the German soldiers in the photograph reproduced in Goldhagen, p. 260 (top).

24. Goldhagen, p. 302. See also Terrence Des Pres, *The Survivor* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989 [1987]), esp. chapter III, "Excremental Assault."

25. Many accounts of the Holocaust demonstrate that when it came to the extermination of the Jews the Germans were not interested solely in efficiency. They also wanted to have fun with their project, to indulge their sense of humor. The wall isolating the Jews in the Podgorze district of Krakow, for example, was built to resemble the walls of many Jewish cemeteries and to mimic the shape of Jewish gravestones. It

was less an architecture of efficient murder than of deliberate humiliation and terror. Though it does not mention this wall, Goldhagen's book, by insisting on the individual lives behind the many hundreds of million acts which constituted the Holocaust, rescues from near oblivion the knowledge that it sprang from the nimble but hateful anti-Semitic imagination of at least one German who was not just a faithful bureaucrat, and probably many others.

26. Goldhagen, pp. 311–315.

27. For one especially egregious example, see David Berreby, "Arrogance, Order, Amity and Other National Traits," *New York Times*, May 26, 1996, Section 4, pp. 1. Berreby quotes Goldhagen on the German world view and then comments, "The Holocaust required not people who were anti-Semitic or totalitarian, he says, but simply German."

28. For example, in his interview with Marty Moss-Coane on "Radio Times," WHYY-FM, Philadelphia, April 15, 1996.

29. Goldhagen, Chapter 15, fn. 38, p. 582.

30. Goldhagen, p. 43–44. He observes in a remarkable *cri de coeur*, "Always present, antisemitism becomes more or less manifest. . . . Thus, the widespread exhibition of antisemitism at any time in a given historical period is properly understood as evidence of its existence, if

only latent, for that entire era." The emphasis is Goldhagen's. See also Chapter 1, fn. 38, p. 486.

31. Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust*, makes a number of suspect arguments but he is surely right to observe how dangerous modernity has come to seem in the light cast by the flames of the Final Solution. The notorious failure of Alain Resnais's memorable documentary film about the extermination camps, *Night and Fog*, to mention the Jews by name is perhaps to be accepted as the result of an early understanding that everyone should feel threatened by modernity, irrespective of social identity or location.

32. When studies of national character still had some cachet in the years after World War Two, they tended to show that the underlying values of Germans resembled those of other industrial societies, such as Sweden and the United States.

33. The massacres in such relatively unbureaucratized nations as Rwanda and Cambodia also should produce some hesitation about this familiar explanation. The slaughter in Rwanda did not even require a sophisticated technology. Most of the killing was by machete, and it proceeded at a rate faster than the Holocaust's. It is a case which provides collateral support for Goldhagen's emphasis on the importance of cultural or ideological factors.

34. Marian Marzynski, *Shtetl*, shown on the PBS program *Frontline* on April 19, 1996.

Searching for the Jesus of History

Christian Anti-Semitism. A History of Hate. By WILLIAM NICHOLS. Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, 1993.

Jesus. A Life. By A. N. WILSON. New York: Norton, 1992.

Reviewed by MICHAEL GOLDBERG

THE IMAGE OF JESUS GENERALLY PRESENTED in Western Art shows him as "tall . . . with blond hair . . . blue eyes, and wearing a white robe and an other-worldly expression."¹ In American films such as *King of Kings*, he looks like the handsomest type of "sportsman in some Ivy

League University."² Of course there have been other images of Jesus ranging from the bearded Pantocrator of Byzantine mosaics to the oriental Jesus depicted in modern-day Japan. What is conspicuously absent from all these visual representations is any hint of Jesus as a Jew.

This is surprising, for although we have long been accustomed to visualize Jesus in the physical form of a white European Christian, it is common knowledge that "Jesus was not a 'Chris-

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tian,' but a Jew," and that his teaching, even at its most iconoclastic points, was "couched in the thought forms and imagery of Judaism."³ Readers of the Gospels have always understood that Jesus was born of a Jewish mother, that he was circumcised on the eighth day, and brought up to fulfill the commandments of the Torah. "But somehow no one, at least among Christian readers of the New Testament, had taken his Jewishness seriously until fairly recently" (p. 11). Nor, one might add, for somewhat different reasons, had Jews.

No longer! At least within the scholarly community, this huge cultural oversight is being rectified. Increasingly Jesus is being studied in the context of the Judaism of the second Temple period in which he lived. Among the most recent of these exciting explorations are two studies, *Jesus. A Life* by the English novelist A. N. Wilson, and *Christian Anti-Semitism: A History of Hate*, a work of major importance by the distinguished religious historian Professor William Nicholls.⁴

The results of this modern research have been startling, constituting in Nicholls' view, "the most momentous development in the whole history of the critical study of the New Testament." The systematic use of Jewish sources to recreate a picture of the world in which Jesus lived, has provided for the first time the lineaments of "a truly convincing picture of Jesus the man as he may have actually existed in historical reality." The picture emerging from such endeavors has radically transformed our image of Jesus, "making it clear beyond reasonable doubt that he was a faithful Jew, in harmony not contradiction with the world of his people" (p. 17).

One must now try to picture a Jesus who wore the peyot and talit, wound on tefilin when he prayed, observed the feasts and fasts of the Jewish calendar,

said the customary blessings, and personally obeyed all the mitzvot, ethical and ritual (p. 13). A Jesus, in fact, who "belongs essentially to Judaism and only accidentally to Christianity" (p. 83).

To "imagine Jesus in a thoroughly Jewish way is very difficult even for Jews, most of whom have also been conditioned to think of him as some kind of Christian. For Christians, it takes real effort" (p. 15). Though scrupulously conforming to the known facts, this image of Jesus as an observant Jew comes as something of a shock when contrasted with the much more familiar picture of Jesus Christ in the traditional reading of the gospels: the Jesus born of a virgin, in a manger in Bethlehem, whose teaching about divine grace was opposed by Jewish legalism, and who made "fundamental criticisms of the religion of his own people, bringing a new message that would soon make it obsolete" (p. 11), a message which along with his Messianic role was rejected by his fellow Jews who ultimately betrayed him to Roman authorities and thus to his death on the Cross.

The latter view, still widely believed to be the "gospel truth," is no longer tenable in the light of historical scholarship which now "permits us to affirm with confidence that Jesus of Nazareth was a faithful and observant Jew, who lived by the Torah, and taught nothing against his own people and their faith. He did not claim to be the Messiah and may even have denied outright that he was. The Jews did not conspire to kill him and were not responsible for his death. He met his end on a Roman cross, condemned by a Roman official for a Roman offense. The myth of the Christ-killers lacks a basis in history. The story it tells of Jewish rejection and malice is not true" (p. xxvi).

If the basic ingredients of the story of Jesus told in the Gospels are untrue, we

are forced to conclude that the Galilean Jesus of historical actuality, and the “divine being of christological orthodoxy” are, two separate beings, light years apart. The theandric figure at “the center of the Christian myth turns out to have been a Jew with nothing distinctive in common with Christianity” (p. 427). Furthermore, it seems that while it is difficult enough to reconstruct this historical figure, the attempt to do so may make it impossible to preserve the credibility of the divine-human figure at the heart of the Christian mythos.

An even more important question presents itself. If the Gospel accounts of the life of Jesus falsely represent Jews as the enemies of the Son of God and as the killers of Christ—has such prejudice been responsible for the many anti-Semitic outrages against Jews in the history of Europe up to and including the Holocaust?

In Nicholls’ view, “the Holocaust cannot be comprehended without taking into account the way the people of Europe had been taught about the Jews . . . by their own religious traditions . . . Nazi anti-Semitism . . . could never have arisen without the Christian past,” to draw upon and of which “it was the secularized offspring” (p. xvii, xxii). All forms of modern anti-Semitism, whether secular, conservative, Marxist or liberal, though not identical with historical Christian anti-Judaism, “clearly sprang from it” and are “branches of the same tree.” All of them have “inherited from the Christian past the conviction that Jews are bad” (p. xxiv).

This supplies urgent contemporary relevance to the new search for the historical Jesus. Such a search is important not just for its own sake and as a form of disinterested academic inquiry, but because it is bound up with the effort to trace the origin and evolution of anti-Semitism which finally, or perhaps not

finally, expressed itself in the Nazi death camps. Is there an inescapable connection between the way the stories of Jesus have been told and the “hallucinatory anti-Semitism,” to use Goldhagen’s term,⁵ the culturally taught paranoia which let ordinary Christian men and women tell themselves that the atrocities they committed were somehow directed not against innocent human victims but rather the agents of some diabolical force they represented? Was, as Nicholls puts it, “the end latent in the beginning? Did an initial disagreement between two groups of Jews on how the Messiah should be recognized contain within itself the seeds of Holocaust?” (p. xxvii). Hard as it may be to imagine, such a conclusion seems on the basis of incontrovertible evidence to be true.

Modern scholarship has “conclusively refuted the anti-Jewish myth” which is central to the Christian account of Jesus. How then, and why did this deadly misrepresentation of the role played by Jesus’ Jewish contemporaries come about? For that we need to look at the Gospels in the light of new critical methods which have “revolutionized the study of Christian origins” (p. 17).

One of the newer aids to this end is the discovery that the gospels are made up of different layers, the so-called “redaction layers” which represent stages at which the original material was edited and reworked over a number of decades before acquiring their final form. As the gospel stories evolved during this editing process they were adjusted in response to changing historical and political circumstances.

This helps to explain: 1) Why the historical events of the trial of Jesus were re-organized in the synoptic gospels to lay blame on the Jews rather than the Romans. In the gospel accounts “the Romans are favorably depicted,” while “the Jewish authorities appear unscrup-

pulous and the Jewish mob blood-thirsty." Such liberties with the truth reflect the "need of the church to be in good standing in the Roman world at the time they were written" (p. 107). At that time, "the Christians were scarcely distinguishable in the eyes of the Romans, from the Jews, and the worshippers of Jesus did all in their power to distinguish themselves from his co-religionists" (Wilson 256).

Consequently, the whole narrative thrust of the Gospel accounts of the trial is to "divert attention from a solid historical fact . . . that Jesus was condemned by a Roman court on a Roman charge, and put to death by a method of execution then used only by the Romans. So successful is this diversion of attention," so compelling the artistry of the gospel stories, "that to this day countless Christians believe that the Jews killed Christ" (p. 108). It was not until over twenty years after the Second World War that the Roman Catholic Church absolved the Jewish people from collective guilt in the death of Jesus. "By then, there were millions of Jesus's fellow believers in Judaism who had died either directly or indirectly because of the idea that they had killed the Son of God" (Wilson 256).

As an embattled minority, "it is easy to see how the evangelists felt the need to distort history in this way." However, "when the Church triumphed over the synagogue . . . the deadly legacy of anti-Semitism remained embodied in the Christian view of the world" (Wilson 256).

2) We can also see how during the process of compiling the Gospels the concept of Jewish messianism was changed both linguistically and conceptually in ways which would have bewildered the real Jesus. Jewish messianic belief was basically historical and political. It rested on historical

redemption through the agency of an anointed king. The new idea encountered in the gospels, of a suffering Messiah who would leave the historical world unchanged, "could hardly have meant anything" to Jesus "as a Jew." It is even harder to "imagine that the Jesus who is increasingly being rediscovered by critical scholarship could have supposed himself to be the divine redeemer of Catholic and Protestant credal orthodoxy" (p. 90).

How did this shift occur? Initially the "earliest Christians were all Jews themselves" and their ideas and beliefs about Jesus were "cast in a thoroughly Jewish mold." Christianity at first retained some contact with the traditional Jewish Messianic hope and "it looked for Christ to return to earth in a few months or years to fulfill the traditional expectations." This hope was unfulfilled and, under the press of disappointment had to be modified to fit the facts. The revised Messianic doctrine took the concept still further from Jewish expectation in the direction of an other-worldly salvation. Such "beliefs were transmitted to early Gentile Christianity, which quickly transformed a sectarian Jewish belief about a novel Messiah into its own myth of the Christ, a supernatural and cosmic redeemer. From this Christian transformation of an originally Jewish concept, there soon grew on the fertile soil of Greek speaking Christianity the doctrine of the divinity of Christ. . . ." In short, "the new religion used Jewish themes and symbols to set forth a myth with a totally different structure from anything known to Judaism" (p. 89).

We have seen how the gospel writers were moved to two responses to history: to ingratiate themselves with Roman authority, and to distance themselves from their Jewish origins. The latter motive was uppermost in the late reshaping of their narratives in which the

historical breach of the nascent church from its Jewish parent is reflected in a new strain of anti-Semitism. "The more Christianity developed into a new and anti-Jewish religion, the more it betrayed Jesus the Jew" who became increasingly forgotten as the "charter myth of the Christian religion" began to "take possession of the Christian mind" (p. xxvi). Furthermore, the "later gospel writers in particular introduced important new ways of telling the story of Jesus that made it significantly more anti-Jewish . . . than the sources behind it, written or oral" (p. 26). "We can thus determine that Christianity became rapidly more anti-Jewish during the course of the most creative period of its development" (p. 26).

The emergence of Gentile Christianity as a distinct entity quite separate from its Jewish origins also initiated what is now recognized as a theology of supersession, which claimed not merely the superiority of the new religion over the old, but that the new had made the old obsolete. The "growth of the theology of supersession is the major second phase in the incremental development of anti-Jewish attitudes in the Christian Church" (p. 172). In the first phase the Christian movement, as a sect of Judaism, set out to establish that Jesus was the Messiah whose history and coming had been foretold in the Old Testament. So long as the Church remained Jewish, this question was paramount in its dispute with the parent source. In the second century the issues between Church and the Jewish people were no longer christological but between "two claimants to be God's people" (p. 173).

3) We are also able now to see how the false depiction of the Pharisees in the gospels reflects not the historical position during the lifetime of Jesus but of a later period when the descendants of the Pharisees represented a resented

opposition to the nascent Gentile Church. The tension of this later struggle was allowed retrospectively to color the description of events which existed in the quite different political and historical climate during Jesus's lifetime. The supposed conflicts between Jesus and the Pharisees helped to imprint "on Christian history the stereotype of the Jews as determined but hypocritical opponents of Jesus," when in truth he shared many of their views and may even have been a Pharisee himself (p. 168).

These violations of what now seem historically certifiable facts raise important questions about the nature as well as the credibility of the gospels themselves. Since "there is practically no real evidence for the life of Jesus outside the New Testament, all the evidence . . . being hermetically sealed within it,"⁶ how to read these scriptures and how to identify their character becomes a matter of paramount importance.

The Gospel stories are great works of art, their abiding power over the imagination is testimony of that fact. However, Professor Nicholls provides a timely reminder that "it would not be out of place to call them propaganda literature, in the original sense of the word, propagating the faith of Christians. They embody authentic historical memories of the actual Jesus, but they use them in the service of the new salvation myth" (p. 160; Wilson 62-63).

It is also clear that the gospel stories employ a consistent narrative strategy to make the events of Jesus' life and ministry fit the prophecies of the Old Testament. For the writers of the New Testament, the Old Testament is a series of anticipations of the events in the life of Christ. The traditional explanation of this relationship is that "in the Old Testament the New Testament is concealed; in the New Testament the

Old Testament is revealed." As a result "everything that happens in the Old Testament is a 'type' or adumbration of something that happens in the New Testament. . . . What happens in the New Testament constitutes an 'antitype,' a realized form of something foreshadowed in the Old Testament."⁷

Thus the Crucifixion, the piercing of Jesus' feet, the mockery of the passers-by, the fact that his legs were not broken on the cross are related to passages in Psalm 22 as is his cry from the Cross. The thirty pieces of silver and the potter's field of the story of Judas are located in Zechariah 11:12-13. In a parallel case, Micah who lived in Judaea between 721-701 B.C.E. says [5:2] that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem so Jesus, "improbably for a Galilean, finds himself being born in Bethlehem."⁸

The Fourth Gospel wishes to "establish that Christianity is the New Israel, a replacement for the old Israel, the old religion of Judaism" (Wilson 50-51). To do this the stories of Jesus are arranged in patterns which echo the readings assigned in the Synagogue Lectionaries for the feasts of the Jewish calendar. Thus in his washing of the disciple's feet, Jesus echoes the Synagogue Lessons for Passover from the Book of Numbers [8:1 ff] in which the Israelites are told to sprinkle the Levites, the sacerdotal class, with water, "that they may do the service of the Lord" (Wilson 51).

When we read them with the corrective lenses provided by modern scholarship, we can begin to grasp the complex literary nature of the gospels and to see as never before, the lineaments of a thoroughly believable portrait of Jesus of Nazareth. We learn, contrary to popular belief, that he "did not found the Christian church. . . . He had no intention of starting even a sect, still less a new world religion." Furthermore, his

teaching was "not new and Christian teaching, but a personal interpretation of the common Jewish faith" (p. 83). Conversely the Jesus Christ of historic Christianity is "a product of the myth-making mind, basing itself upon historical mistakes and misunderstandings, and even upon some falsifications of history" (p. 83).

This leads one to the core of Nicholls' book. As the subtitle, "A history of hate" indicates, his major focus is on the damaging anti-Jewish elements in the Christian gospels which have persisted to our own day. Only critical scholarship "driven by a passion for truth and justice for the Jewish people, can disentangle Christianity from its legacy of anti-Judaism."

This conviction leads him to formulate a series of propositions. If the new scholarship has exposed in the Christian gospels grave anti-Jewish slanders, and detected evident falsehoods, then the consequences go way beyond mere academic interest and broach questions of the most profound moral import. In the conclusion to his richly detailed study, Nicholls raises some of these consequences in the form of questions—questions of enormous scope and complexity as well as invigorating challenges to the conventional wisdom of both Jews and Christians.

For the Christian religion the new findings of biblical scholarship have produced a crisis, at the heart of which lies the conundrum: "Christianity without Jesus is unimaginable. Christianity with Jesus may be impossible." Tradition holds that Jesus is "the ultimate authority for Christians. We now find that the only kind of religion for which Jesus himself can be taken as an authority is the Torah-observant Judaism of the early first century. . . . Christianity as the world has always known it . . . has turned out to be devoid of founda-

tion in Jesus himself. Is Christianity then fatally flawed and without historical basis? Is its chronic anti-Jewishness, often and easily sliding over into anti-Semitic hatred, a defect so grave as to vitiate its spiritual contribution to human beings?" (p. 431). Can harboring the seeds of hatred against the innocent be a secure basis for a religion espousing grace and compassion?

These startling questions, startling because they are so evidently valid, and equally because they are so rarely heard, bear directly on the personal experience of A. N. Wilson. With commendable frankness at the outset of his book, he outlines the effect his understanding of the new biblical research had on his beliefs. Over the course of much study and reflection he "found it impossible to believe that a first-century Galilean holy man had at any time of his life believed himself to be the Second Person of the Trinity.⁹ It was such an inherently improbable thing for a monotheistic Jew to believe." Nor, having learnt how to read the New Testament critically, could he "find the smallest evidence that Jesus had ever entertained such beliefs about himself" (Wilson 57).

After what he describes as a slow and painful process he came "to discard a belief in Christianity" and "did not feel it was honest to continue to call myself a Christian. . . . I knew many of my fellow Christians shared my doubts and have continued somehow or another to reconcile the practice of the Christian faith with the knowledge that it is founded on a fundamental untruth; but I could not do this" (Wilson xvi).

Neither, however, could Wilson adopt the skeptic's view that we could know nothing of Jesus himself. On the contrary, in the writings of Geza Vermes and those who think like him, he found that "Jesus comes alive again as a recognizable Jew of the first century. . . . This

is the Jesus in whom I have come to believe. . . . In seeking him as an historical being, he has been in some ways much more vivid to me than he ever was when I tried to approach him through the eyes of Christian belief" (Wilson xvii).

The personal conclusions these two authors draw from the mounting evidence of scholarship, diverge. For Wilson the discovery of a believable Jewish Jesus, meant the abandonment of traditional faith. For Nicholls the scholarly discoveries have ignited his sense of justice and the need to expiate the historical injustice done to the Jewish people. For him the consequences form themselves into a number of moral imperatives and speculations.

Within the Christian community he believes, "many falsehoods must now be eradicated from the way Christians tell the story of their origins. . . . This cannot be done without criticism of the central Christian myth, as well as its embodiment in the sacred writings that Christians venerate as Scripture" (p. xxviii). Such an effort also entails re-considering Christianity's historical relationship to Judaism as its originating source. "Historians, including Christian historians, must learn to see early as well as modern Judaism in its own integrity, and not in relation to Christianity, as its forerunner or even opposite" (p. xxvi).

"I believe that the double crisis for Christianity, precipitated by its failure in the time of the Holocaust to stand up for the Jewish people, together with the discovery by modern scholarship of the Jewishness of Jesus himself, now demands an honest response." The crisis is deep and goes to the roots of Christianity, "not just its anti-Jewishness but its non-Jewishness are now in question" (p. 431).

If, he speculates, a collective effort led to a Church cleansed of the taint of anti-

Semitism, "if we could imagine the Church, like the prodigal son, now setting forth on the long journey back to the Father's house, repenting of the sin of anti-Semitism . . . we can be sure that it would receive the Father's welcome. But if it were to knock on the door of the synagogue and ask for admittance, what would it find within?" (p. 433). It would find a "house hardly less disordered than its own" for Judaism too has been "disrupted by the crises of modernity."

What the new scholarship asks of the Jewish community is whether "contemporary Judaism is ready to repossess Jesus and install him where he belongs, among its own spiritual teachers? Jesus is the only bridge across which the repentant church could ever walk back to its original home. But he cannot be a bridge until Jews fully acknowledge him as their own" (p. 434). And, of course, "Jews cannot repossess Jesus until they are able to detach him in their own minds from responsibility for all that Christians have said about them and done to them in his name. Many Jews find the new picture of Jesus as disconcerting as Christians do, but for very different reasons" (p. 434).

Nevertheless the time for choice has arrived. In history, the holocaust, and in scholarship, historical discoveries, set "before Christians the most revolutionary choice that has faced them since the Church first split off from Judaism" (p. 437). One cannot predict what that choice will be. Nicholls is realist enough to suspect that "the reaction of most will be to ignore the pressing need for choice and go on as before. In the foreseeable future, it is not likely that the Church as a whole will make any such grand return to its origins" (p. 437).

However, if a repentant church were ever "to return to its origins and rejoin the Jewish people en masse, that would be a bringing in of the Gentiles beyond

anything Paul in his day was able to conceive" (p. 436).

It is impossible to speak too highly of the intellectual sweep of Nicholls' book. Its huge labor is driven by conscience and courage which sets out to rectify an injustice far greater than any of the ethnic slights which weekly trouble and appall contemporary sensibilities. It exposes with righteous indignation a case of cultural appropriation on a massive historical scale. Yet for all his passionate sympathy and understanding, his tone is level, and his arguments are advanced with incisive logic reinforced with details compiled by an impeccable scholarship. William Nicholls has produced a monumental and inspiring book which is likely to endure for a very long time as the outstanding treatment of its subject.

In the growing list of works on the Holocaust there have been many attempts to grapple with the meaning of that unimaginable horror, and to place responsibility for it among various active participants or in the moral inertia of its spectators. This is a journey into the sensitive core of the aroused Christian conscience. It seeks repentance for historical Christian anti-Semitism, as a "spiritual necessity for Christians themselves, whether or not it can earn forgiveness from Jews" (p. xxviii).

My own sense is that many Jewish readers will find in the mere existence of Professor Nicholls' honest yet inevitably painful chronicle of the "history of hate," an encouraging sign of that "hopeful history of reconciliation" which has already begun and in which his book is bound to play an important role. It has been said that a great book is one that changes one's life or profoundly alters one's perception of reality. No one who reads Nicholls' book with an open mind, will ever again be able to approach its subject without enlarged insight and understanding.

NOTES

1. William Nicholls, *Christian Anti-Semitism. A History of Hate* (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, 1993), p. 13. Exceptions to this general rule include Chagall's "White Crucifixion," [1938] and Rembrandt's eleven portraits of Jesus produced between 1648–1661. Rembrandt's belief in a physical link between the Jews of Amsterdam and their Biblical ancestors led to his refusal to endow his pictures of Jesus with either classical Greek, Roman, or Nordic features. Chagall's painting shows Christ with a talit covering his lower body, and in the foreground a Nazi uniformed figure desecrating a synagogue.
2. A. N. Wilson, *Jesus: A Life* (New York: Norton, 1992), p. 254 (hereafter Wilson).
3. Rudolf Bultmann, *Primitive Christianity in its Contemporary Setting*, translated by R. H. Fuller (New York: Meridian, 1956), p. 71.
4. Both Wilson and Nicholls acknowledge the

pioneering efforts of such scholars as E. P. Sanders, Hyam Maccoby, David Flusser, James Charlesworth, Emil Schürer, and Geza Vermes among others.

5. Daniel Jonah Goldhagen, *Hitler's Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust*, (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1996).

6. Northrop Frye, *The Great Code: The Bible and Literature* (Toronto, 1982), p. 42.

7. Frye, p. 79.

8. Wilson, p. 62. On Psalm 22 see also Erich Fromm, *You Shall be as Gods: A Radical Interpretation of the Old Testament and Its Tradition* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1966), pp. 181–85.

9. See Louis Jacobs, *A Jewish Theology* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1973), who points out that in the Rabbinic period Jewish objection was to the incarnation as a form of dualism. In the Medieval period the trinitarian concept was the object of Jewish criticism.

Lives of God

God. A Biography. By JACK MILES. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995.

A History of God: The 4000-Year Quest of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. By KAREN ARMSTRONG. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993.

Reviewed by GILDAS HAMEL

SECULARIZATION—THE STEAM-ROLLING process of rationalization—has been gobbling up traditional beliefs and customs, the Bible being one of its main objects, for now three centuries. The intensive historical criticism of two centuries has flattened scripture, succeeded by a generation's work in modern literary study. Yet, some questions have eluded the machine's grasp. As recently as 1993, in the *Narrative in the Hebrew*

Bible (Oxford Bible Series, Oxford University Press), D. M. Gunn and D. N. Fewell noted that there are gaps in the account. "None of the commentators is willing to explore *the character of God*" with loyalty to "established dogma" apparently "determinative. What God does is generally assumed to be unchallengeable, despite the fact that the question of justice in God's initial treatment of Cain is raised as early as the Targum." Blocking "awkward ques-

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tions about God's intentions, desires, and accountability is a widespread practice—though not universal (witness, for example, Voltaire)—in the interpretation of biblical narrative" (p. 28). Actually, questions about God's intentions have seriously occupied theologians for a long time, with rather more Christians than Jews worrying the issue. But the notion that God would have something like a history has been considered taboo indeed, a reduction of a being thought to be extra-historical and extra-textual.

If one takes seriously the idea that the Bible is literature, as has been done especially in the English-speaking world, it does appear curious that God has not yet been studied as a character within the text rather than as its external author or inspirer. This fascinating question, perhaps already "*dans l'air du temps*" ever since Scripture began to be examined as literature, has now been fully asked by Jack Miles, in a powerful, wide-ranging, thoughtful, and clearly written book justly rewarded this year with a Pulitzer Prize.

Miles goes back neither to the questioning of the Targum / Talmud nor to Voltaire's sulfurous ironies. He follows the development of God as a wholly prospective, dynamic character, without a past or genealogy. The character of God as protagonist evolves as the image of his antagonist(s) changes. So, as the story unfolds, his image becomes more and more complex, in spite of several lulls in the development of the characters. Miles stays close to his idea, on the rhetorical plane, tracking all the changes in personality in the divine character, but not—and this is central to his argument—simply explaining them away as a conflation of divinities of polytheistic origin. He is keenly aware, however, of historical criticism, and one learns much about it in his learned footnotes and his remarks on the editing of the Tanakh.

In his analysis of the dynamics of the text, Miles shows how various aspects of the divinity have yielded the composite character called God. At the beginning of Genesis, for example, the deity is both creator and destroyer of the universe. This contradiction is partially solved by a "fertility covenant" with Abraham, a compromise with part of humanity. He also has become a personal god ("God of . . ."). In the whole chapter on Abraham, pages 47–66, Miles beautifully delineates how the story progresses dynamically towards the idea of a "numerous seed." Yet, as it progresses, the idea is more and more threatened all along, as the chance to see the seed come to fruition becomes slimmer and slimmer, culminating with the sacrifice of Isaac. Along the way, the divine agent's interventions are less and less powerful.

In Joseph's story God is rarely mentioned, with either few or no direct appeals to God by Joseph, yet the "spirit of God" is recognized as being with Joseph throughout. At this stage of the story, the Lord (tetragrammaton) is completely identified with God (*elohim*). The spirit of God inhabits Joseph as an interpreter of dreams. Some form of entropy must be at work then from Adam through Noah and Abraham, then Jacob, to Joseph: from the clear, daylight encounters with the divinity to more mysterious meetings, then night encounters and dreams, and now, with Joseph, only dreams about others. The divine will seems to burrow deeper and deeper and is to be found in the folds of history, even small-time history, in need of interpretation. With Joseph's story, we move from a "Lord God . . . maximally powerful and minimally kind" to a God "maximally kind and minimally powerful" (p. 81).

But in Exodus, the Lord finds himself having to defend the posterity of

Abraham and takes on a more volcanic character, essentially that of a Ba'al-like divinity. Yet, if he is a dangerous character, he also is a lawgiver, and the giving of the law in Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy functions as a calming counterpoint of sorts to his sulfurous side. And he has gained an intimacy with Moses, in contrast to his lofty and powerful side. So, as he remains a personal god since Genesis, his warring and lawgiving in Exodus are, by implication, also personalized (p. 124).

It would be a disservice to the reader, I think, to continue the summary and tell what will happen next to the divine character in the following books of Tanakh in their traditional order: the ambiguities to be solved; the various "personae" to be discovered; how elements of tenderness will make their way into the text; the struggle to continue, to exist; and how a denouement will be found or work itself out. In Miles' book, one is invited to rediscover the Hebrew Bible, under its lava-like flow, not as a haphazard compilation but as a mysterious story which is full of surprises and evokes constant wonderment.

The way in which the divine appearances to human beings are framed within the biblical text parallels the development of the character analyzed by Miles and could have been used to bolster his interpretation. As has been noted in the past by various critics, after the first conversations with Adam and Abraham in the open light of day (but already muted or more mysterious for Abraham), God appears at night and in dreams to Jacob, and is only remotely a power behind the dreams interpreted by Joseph. In Exodus, the appearances to Moses seem more open again (during the day), but take the shape of mysterious, dynamic, objects. As later books unfold, God appears in visions heard by prophets—a strange synaesthetic way of

collapsing the major senses—and is apparently devoid of any role in Chronicles or in the book of Esther.

I found Miles' interpretation of biblical texts, especially of Genesis and Exodus, as well as the prophets and the book of Job, to be richly rewarding, enabling the reader to come to new and numerous insights, even and especially when disagreeing with him. Let me give a couple of examples. In the story of Sodom and the preliminary discussion between Abraham and God, the author sees the patriarch as responding to the divinity's offer of shared counsel with "aggressive, sarcastic, insinuating flattery of his own" (p. 55). When God adds righteousness as a condition of fulfillment of the over-repeated divine promise of a numerous posterity, Miles sees a manipulation of character at work. Indeed, God makes this promise of a numerous posterity six times to Abraham. One could understand Abraham showing hints of impatience. These are interesting suggestions, but after a few readings of the Hebrew text, it was not clear to me that sarcasm or even irony are intended in Gen. 18.22–33. A game of sorts is taking place, granted. It is actually interesting that Abraham makes six successive requests in this text, which could be considered (and this goes along with Miles' idea) as a signal of Abraham's irony in his response to the six divine promises. But one could also argue that what is at stake here is the proper definition of justice, and God may have known in advance (i.e., the audience would read this into his character) that the *whole* of Sodom would behave unrighteously. On the whole, it is also possible that essential issues are being played out without irony: the proper identification of the Lord; the problem of narrowing down the promise; and the proper measure of justice. Yet, God appears to be a very

fluid character indeed, with massive “swing moods” as Miles shows so well, whereas Abraham turns out to be taking the defined role of the solid and reliable sort of person. If a more accurate grammar or rhetoric of the divine character is to be mapped, perhaps a better assessment has to wait for a more complete rhetorical analysis of all the essential characters.

The irony or heated impatience which Miles sees in Abraham’s answer to the Lord (he stands before the Lord again in Gen. 18.22) could simply be seen as a need to define *tsedaqah* and *mishpat*, which are closely related to each other. What is the right quantity of charity which will stay the hand of justice? This is a critical question pursued throughout the biblical text.

Regarding the identity of the “man” who wrestled with Jacob at night by Jabbok ford, Miles offers a fascinating suggestion, namely that it might have been Esau himself (pp. 73–74). But how could Esau say “You have striven with God and men and have prevailed” (Gen 32.29), after hearing the name of his brother, Jacob? Furthermore, later on, in Gen 33.1, after the sun is up, here comes Esau and four hundred men: why would he have come at night? Yet, the play on the word *panim* all along chapter 32 of Genesis suggests that the night struggle has something to do with Jacob’s permanent fight with Esau, undistinguishable from his fight with God.

When it comes to historical matters, on problems of date, edition, and socio-political background, Miles summarizes the scholarly consensus very usefully and is obviously aware of the latest developments in the field of historical criticism. He is prudent in his judgments, for instance in the problem of the historicity of Exodus (pp. 104–105, again p. 109). He distances himself from

historical reasoning at various points, for instance regarding the explanation normally given for the insertion of Leviticus as God’s speech at Sinai, namely that it was a matter of authority for the priestly editors of the Pentateuch. For Miles, the particular placement of this book and its rhetorical shape has another effect. As a speech, it “characterizes the speaker” (p. 129). After the terrifying aspect this God has revealed in Exodus, Leviticus presents a liturgically circumscribed power, somewhat domesticated, a lull in the story.

In philological matters, Miles appears sure footed, but some of these problems have a long and difficult history, e.g., the meaning he proposes for *ehyeh asher ehyeh*, after other Hebraicists, is “I am what I do,” since “God gives not context” (p. 99). But perhaps one could go along with Martin Buber in this case and think that verse 3.12, “I will be *with you*,” provides the required context.

I am puzzled by another aspect of Miles’ presentation of God as character within a complex unfolding plot: the author makes the character think, desire, fear, ignore, etc., so for instance, on p. 151, “he understands,” “he sees. . . .” Often I am not quite sure if this is short hand for what the biblical author/ redactor is doing, or if Miles is simply imagining what his rhetorically constrained hero has in his head.

Local complaints aside, and they are few, Miles has built a strong case. From now on, readers of the Bible will have to take seriously the idea that the divine character, like any literary character, has flaws, strengths, great complexity, and, eminently, a capacity to evolve in relation to the events in which this character participates. Seen at the surface of the text, God has a history, appearing as father, among other roles eventually, because a number of textual events have happened before.

But at this point, the text-historical problem has to be considered again. How much of this “building of character” is due to the historical evolution—to put it broadly: social and cultural evolution—of the Hebrew/Jewish people? How much of the evolution of the divine character is *sui generis*, due to textual constraints, to the intratextual dynamics, and how much has been shaped by the writers’ and editors’ reactions to changing social, economic, political, and military situations? It is not the purpose of Miles’ book to answer these questions, though he alludes to them, for instance in the neat introduction to the chapters on prophecy. A little surprisingly, however, in these passages where he presents the results of historical criticism, he appears to be overly prudent and chooses the more traditional views (e.g., the story of the Exodus reflects some historical event, though the figures given in the historical account cannot be historical). The contrast with his otherwise bold thesis is somewhat puzzling.

Part of the strength of this book is its problematization of neat logical or, in this case, rhetorical categories, including its own. This clarity, strangely enough, may lead one back to the contemplation of an ever-deepening mystery, as a friend told me on the slopes of Mount Meiron, on our way back from the city of Safed: “One comes to the Torah again and again thinking one knows and understands the text, but as one reads it, it becomes once more opaque, troublesome, contradictory, . . . something like the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, an ambivalent *pharmakon* which is at once a source of life and a danger, depending on dosage.”

Thus it follows that the question of the authors’ and redactors’ inspiration is left unresolved, and is in part renewed by

Miles’ book. After reading his analysis, the writing of the Bible appears at least to this reader as even more problematic and puzzling, a more mysterious process than ever. At the very least instead of appearing to be the haphazard compilation which historical criticism has suggested, the Bible can be read, even if one does not believe in its divine authorship, as possessing a strong if hidden unity.

Miles’ book exemplifies a fundamental respect towards the text and a kind of awe before the divine character. We remain in awe before the strange mesh, the *textus* we encounter—between the rhetorical evolution of the text, the fact that it makes or produces sense from whatever angle one looks at it—and the bonds between this intratextual development of the text and the history with which writers, tradents, final editors, and now readers and auditors of the text turn out to have been struggling all along.

How to relate the evolution of God’s character as a literary construct to the evolution of society is not directly the topic of Karen Armstrong’s book. The title, *A History of God*, is shorthand for a history of the notions of God in the three monotheistic faiths, a history conceived very broadly as the history of monotheism’s avatars. It surveys the history of monotheism from Abraham to the present day. The notion of God as formed by different generations in response to different needs, undergoes dramatic changes which the author follows chronologically and comparatively. Although the author started her quest thinking that this notion of God was a “projection of humans’ needs and desires” (p. xix), she recognizes that the relationship between idea and society is actually very complex.

Armstrong’s book is a useful and clear summary of numerous theological

themes, concatenated in historical order, and with an occasional discussion of the historical and political background. One would have wished for more discussion of this kind, but then, this would be asking for an immensely more complex book, or series of books. I found particularly useful her extensive presentations of Islamic thinkers and the parallels she drew to similar developments in Christianity and Judaism (chapter 6). Other readers, depending on their background, will find her descriptions of the evolution of monotheism in Judaism or in Christianity an excellent starting point. The book is accompanied by a list of suggestions for further reading and a full subject and name index. The latter will make the book most useful to readers wishing to read further on any of the most important intellectual moments and personalities of each of the three faiths.

The first two chapters deal with Mesopotamia's and Canaan's polytheism, the origin of Yahwism, the advent of a stricter monotheism in the prophetic period and especially under the shock of the exile to Babylon, and the challenge posed by Greek culture. The second chapter closes with an account of the rabbinic movement and its spirituality, presented in very favorable terms. Chapter 3 presents Jesus, his followers' belief in his divinity, Paul's role as the "founder of Christianity," and early developments in Christian theology. Chapter 4 is devoted to the exposition of the difficult and sometimes violent fights surrounding the definition of the nature of the Christian God: the doctrine of Incarnation and the Trinity. The spiritual life of Muhammad, the revelation of the Koran, and the ideas of the early Moslem commentators are described in chapter 5. The following chapter deals with the great philosophers of Islam and medi-

eval Judaism and Christianity. Chapter 7 is an account of the mystic side of the three faiths, from "throne mysticism" to Kabbalah and Sufism, with vignettes of numerous mystics. The Reformation's most important notions, the Jesuits as part of the Counter-Reform, and the parallel hardening of the division between Shi'ites and Sunnis in Islamic countries are the topics of chapter 8. In chapter 9, the new interrogations about God and the development of a reason-based religion stemming from the Enlightenment are set in a background of technological and economic change in the West. Many important thinkers such as Pascal, Descartes, Spinoza, Mendelssohn, and Kant, pietistic groups of northern Europe and the U.S., and Jewish messianic movements, are reviewed in chronological order. Chapter 10 pursues this history of ideas with some of the great nineteenth- and twentieth-century philosophers: a new search for spirit has been set in motion in reaction to the cult of reason. For what concerns Judaism, we read about the emergence of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, the response of a Rosenzweig to the challenge of a reason-based faith in an anti-Semitic Europe, and the seeming death of the idea of God in the Shoah. The concluding chapter, beginning with an apocalyptic paragraph, wonders whether there is a future in the notion of God. Contra the atheism(s) of a Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, and Camus or the dry positivism of an Ayer, and against the menace of rising fundamentalisms, the author believes that the call to compassion, as a virtue found in all religions, demands a renewed search for God.

All through the book, the evolution of human ideas about the divine is presented in an historical manner, for itself, but it is in competition with another idea, namely that the divinity is at work in human evolution, as if the

godhead were accompanying its charges like a good tutor. But how does one know this?

So, for example, regarding Ezekiel's prophetic imagination, Armstrong contrasts polytheism and monotheism in the following terms: "Ezekiel had become an icon of the radical discontinuity that the cult of Yahweh involved" whereas paganism "had celebrated the continuity that was felt to exist between the gods and the natural world." And then the author continues: "Alien as Yahweh frequently seemed, he was encouraging Israelites like Ezekiel to see that the blows of history were not random and arbitrary but had a deeper logic and justice" (p. 59). However, instead of starting with God as supreme teacher endowed with perfect knowledge, it would seem possible to reverse course and start from the "blows of history" and a human desire for logic and justice, at odds with some aspects of polytheism, to explain to some degree the monotheistic expression of "radical discontinuity." The author wavers and ends the paragraph saying: "He [Ezekiel presumably, though grammatically the subject is Yahweh] was trying to find a meaning in the cruel world of international politics." In the following pages, however, concerning Second Isaiah, she focuses on the people's condition at the time to explain the birth of "the religion of Judaism" (p. 61).

At many points I found myself wondering if Armstrong were imagining what the divinity thinks, feels, and sees, as in most of Christian theology, or if one should supply, almost at every turn of phrase, "as the Bible presents it," or "as the prophets imagined it," etc., that is to say, human ideas about God. Ambiguity of this kind is not, in my view, helpful.

There are passages on the economic

and social background of the evolution of the monotheistic idea, for instance regarding Calvinism and the birth of the new bourgeoisie (p. 280), but they leave one hungry for more. So, for instance, the Renaissance is seen as a period of extreme anxiety, yet also as a new "kind of society, based on science and technology" (p. 286). One wonders: Is the anxiety about the divinity somehow the engine of these discoveries, or is it a consequence of scientific discoveries? At the beginning of her chapter on the Enlightenment, Armstrong correctly judges that the "process of technicalization" led to a new kind of society which "would affect the Western perception of the role and nature of God." But what of the concomitant possibility of the converse, namely that changes in the perception of God led to a new scientific spirit? One nice example is given right before, on pp. 288–89, concerning Luther's and Calvin's view of a transcendent God and a passive nature: the shape of their monotheism can be seen as offering new intellectual possibilities in the sciences. And she sees in Pascal elements of a "darker spirituality." There is something to this, perhaps especially in regard to his Jansenist period. But it seems contradicted by the glory of his extraordinarily clear and rhythmic language, from which one gets, at least in the original French, a sense of confidence and trust in the powers of reason.

Her view of history is moralizing at times, for instance in the defense of Islam's progressivism, or her critique of the (Christian) West. This is perhaps due to a modern concern of the book, namely the search for a new formulation of the idea of God in our time. Yet, in my judgment, moral judgment is an obstacle to a more complex understanding of history, for instance of the Cru-

sades. In his book on literary and iconographic imagery, Alphonse Dupront for example accounts in a more satisfactory way why so many people took the risk of leaving Europe to go and “rescue” Jerusalem, though these ventures may have turned out indeed to be also pre-colonial enterprises (*Du sacré: croisades et pe’lerinages, images et langages*. Paris: Gallimard, 1987). The fourteenth-sixteenth centuries are another period in which Armstrong sees “the dark side of the Western spirit” (p. 273), an expression again used regarding the witch hunts (p. 275). I found this formulation rather unhelpful.

As with Miles, but for different reasons, one wishes Armstrong’s book would go further and ask more systematically the question of the relationship between monotheism and certain forms of society. She does propose this as a factor in the case of Islam. But it would have been possible to ask it all along and focus on it systematically rather than write an encyclopedic summary of the intellectual variants of the monotheistic idea. For instance, and without wanting

to reduce the history of ideas to social history, how are the social forms and tensions of Byzantine times related to the bloody fights over the nature of the Trinity? Does what is at stake have to do with the structure of authority within families, towns, the empire?

More fundamentally, why did monotheistic religions come about? For instance, in the Bible, do we have monotheism as the precipitate of a literary process, in a clash of notions propelling and shaping the character’s unity as the story unfolds? This is not Miles’ view, who opts for the monotheistic idea as preceding the literary expression. Or do certain forms of society require a view of human and physical nature which polytheism fails to give but various forms of monotheism provide? This kind of question has been asked in the sociology of religion by Max Weber and raised once more in a brilliant book by Marcel Gauchet in *Le de’senchantement du monde: une histoire politique de la religion* (Paris: Gallimard, 1985). It is the sort of question which could be fruitfully pursued, one hopes, by historians as well as philosophers.



Art by Fred Cohen, "Prayer" (1994).

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always arriving, always sailing away. And the fences and the piers
and the policemen and the flags and the high masts of churches
and mosques and the smokestacks of synagogues and the boats
of psalms of praise and the mountain-waves. The shofar blows: another one
has just left. Yom Kippur sailors in white uniforms
climb among ladders and ropes of well-tested prayers.*

*And the commerce and the gates and the golden domes:
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*Yehuda Amichai, from Jerusalem, 1967, translated by Stephen Mitchell
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